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Once upon a place: The construction of specialness by visitors to Iona

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies

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Declaration

I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of PhD Religious Studies has

- i) been composed entirely by myself
- ii) been solely the result of my own work
- iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

Krittika Bhattacharjee

Abstract

This is an ethnographic study of visitors to the island of Iona on the west coast of Scotland, popularly reputed to be a **‘special’ place**. Using qualitative data obtained through interviews and participant observation, it explores the situated category of **the ‘special’ as visitors apply it** to Iona: analysing its form, its key elements, the process of its construction, and its application across a range of interactions and settings on the island. The **thesis argues that the ascription of ‘specialness’ to Iona** is a visitor narrative of belonging, **a form of visitor ‘work’, and a way for Iona’s** transient subjects to participate in the ongoing, everyday life on the island. The thesis marks its origins in the idea of tourists as producers (chapter 1), the academic field of religion and tourism (chapter 2) and the field site of Iona (chapter 3). It **then ‘turns’, arguing that the theoretical frameworks used in religion and tourism** cannot be readily applied to the case of visitors on Iona, and advocating a shift to **the vocabulary of the ‘special’, borrowed from visitors and theorised in light of the** work by Ann Taves (chapter 4). In its second half, it provides a systematic study of specialness on Iona **through an analysis of various ‘moving parts’: its form (the story; chapter 5), its contents (safety; connectedness and a sense of being ‘out-of-time’;** chapter 6), its construction (the processes of gazing and possessing; chapter 7), its functions (enabling visitors to make **‘homes’ and mark their ‘place’ on the island;** chapter 8), and its implications for wider studies of religion and tourism (chapter 9). In offering a malleable conceptualisation of specialness with broad explanatory value, in considering visitors to be agents and producers of their own experience, and in providing an in-depth ethnography of narratives about a significant and contemporary visitor destination, this thesis aims to expand the scope of the **‘Religion and Tourism’** nexus in which it began.

Lay Summary

How can a place be both ‘touristic’ and ‘religious’ at the same time? What is the role of the visitor in such places? Guided by these questions, this thesis presents an in-depth case study of the island of Iona on the west coast of Scotland, where both tourism and religion have a long history. The small island of Iona has a hefty reputation as a place of historical, religious, geological, spiritual, ornithological, Romantic significance. This complex place exposes the limitations of scholarly understandings of religion and tourism and urges the need for a broader vocabulary. **To that end, this thesis proposes a turn to the concept of the ‘special’:** a term seen both in visitor narratives about Iona and in the academic study of religion. Using data collected through interviews and observations, it offers a localised and **detailed study of ‘specialness’ as it is expressed by Iona’s visitors.** It analyses, in **turn: visitor stories of Iona’s specialness, the elements of Iona that are selected as special,** the ways in which these selections are made, and why the idea of specialness is useful to visitors. It concludes that specialness is a way for visitors to assert and explain their sense of belonging to the island, a way for them to participate in its everyday life. By examining the particularities of contemporary visitorship on Iona and by offering a structured understanding of the special that can be transported to other places, this thesis hopes to widen the scope of field of religion and tourism itself.

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1. Introduction



Figure 1.1 | Lona Jetty

Left: image of lona jetty from a travel website; Right: fieldwork photograph of lona jetty on an observation day.

When a visitor to a small island off the west coast of Scotland says, ‘this place is special’, what does she mean? What is this ‘specialness’, and why is it important to the field of religion and tourism? This thesis argues for the importance of specialness as a way of widening the conversation on religion, as a way of bridging the difference between scholarly categories and vernacular expression, and as a way of acknowledging the liveliness of visitors and visitor destinations. In this way, it furthers three important strands of analysis: the situational understanding of travel and the traveller; the conceptual category of the special; the complexity of the visitor place.

Using the visitor as a useful surrogate for this enquiry and ethnography as method, this thesis presents a descriptive-analytical category of specialness on lona: a

Scottish island in the inner Hebrides. It shows how the ascription of specialness allows visitors to navigate this complex place and its multivalent reputation (as religious, spiritual, historic, Romantic, scenic, rural) and to participate with their immediate material and metaphorical contexts. Specialness, then, is a form of visitor home-making. This is the figure we are left with at the end of the thesis: the visitor as a producer of specialness, performing physical, imaginative, discursive labours as part of her bid for belonging. The figure we begin with, however, is rather **different: an ‘idiot’ on a television programme.**

The show is *An Idiot Abroad*: a travel documentary series that first aired on Sky1 in the UK in September of 2010. The show was created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant, creators of the critically acclaimed television series *The Office*¹. It involved them deploying their friend Karl Pilkington to travel around the world while Gervais and Merchant tracked his progress from their office in London. Pilkington made for a largely unwilling and always morose host, and his oblique remarks and inadvertent mishaps made for entertaining viewing. He was not, for instance, **impressed by the Chichen Itza in Mexico (‘It’s alright, yeah, it’s just a big pyramid’) the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Brazil (‘I thought the chin looks a bit big’), or the Great Wall of China (‘It goes over the hills and stuff for miles, but so does the M6’).** When Pilkington visited Haridwar for the Kumbh Mela (a Hindu fair and pilgrimage for which millions congregate on the banks of the river Ganges) words like ‘wonderful’, ‘incredible’, vibrant’, ‘colourful’ that are standard in the tourist register for describing India were entirely absent from his vocabulary. ‘It is wonderful’, Mark Twain had written of the Kumbh Mela in 1895, ‘the power of a

¹ ‘An Idiot Abroad’ Directed by Krishnendu Majumdar, Executive Producers Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant. SKY 1, September 2010: ‘Mexico’; ‘Brazil’; ‘China’; ‘India’

faith like that, that can make multitudes...enter without hesitation or complaint upon such incredible journeys and endure the resultant miseries without repining'².

Pilkington, in comparison, was **less impressed by these shows of faith** ('I thought they'd be sort of more religious looking, you know, prim and proper. This one hasn't even got pants on.').

My fascination for Pilkington as a 'tourist' was informed by the fact that I was, at the time, absorbed by the academic study of tourism itself. An underlying assumption in much of the scholarly literature, and especially in the theorisation of mass tourism in the early years of the twentieth century, was of tourists as consumers: travelling to places **of repute, accepting the 'authentic' sites they were** presented without question, buying souvenirs, offering appreciation. The tourist subject, it seemed, was regulated by certain basic rules: rules governing the site at **large ('do not enter', 'do not touch the objects on display', 'pay here')** but also rules of conduct: being silent in a place of worship, expressing awe inside museums. But Pilkington was no such tourist. He did not speak in syntactical forms and made up his own mind about whether the places he saw were, in fact, religious, or historic, or beautiful, whether they were worth travelling to at all. His tourism was, in other words, unruly.

The recognition of Pilkington's unruliness has informed this current work in two ways. The first of these may be familiar to any scholar of religion: that the everyday **actions of people 'on the ground' can defeat scholarly attempts to theorise them.**

² Mark Twain, *Following the Equator: a Journey Around The World* (American Publishing Company, 1897) p. 164.

Pilkington's tourism did not fit into any of the tourist types or modes suggested in the academic literature in the field, and the available theories were insufficient to explain the relationships he made in and with the places he visited. He **demonstrated the difficulty of reconciling the 'etic' (the external, the narrative of the scholar) and the 'emic' (the internal, the narrative of the practitioner)**³. Second, Pilkington made evident that the project of travel carries a host of accumulated moral and cultural meaning, with the weight of this baggage being carried by the visitor. This, after all, is why Pilkington **is the show's eponymous 'idiot'** - because he fails to make the 'correct' meaning at these reputed tourist sites, fails to engage with them in the way that is expected, fails to take the project of travel seriously. In this way, Pilkington becomes the kind of visitor from whom the viewers of the show - and its creators - can set themselves apart.

These two lessons have motivated the primary enquiry of this thesis - on the meaning **and use of 'specialness' within the context of religion and tourism** - and its choice of research method, **an 'on-the-ground', situated ethnography of visitors** to the island of Iona. Using the literature on religion and tourism as a point of departure, it presents an ethnographic snapshot of the island of Iona as a contemporary visitor destination. It applies the rich qualitative data collected during five months of fieldwork on Iona to developing a descriptive-analytical **category of the 'special' as it is applied by visitors to the island**. By prioritising the immediacy and liveliness of visitor engagements with Iona, it theorises the co-constructive relationship between people and places: where visitors produce their

³ Thomas Headland, Kenneth Pike and Marvin Harris (Eds.), *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990)

material and metaphorical surroundings, and where visitor destinations are both the product of interpretations and instrumental in shaping them. In this way, the thesis uses respondent data to bring together three strands of enquiry: on the visitor and her practice of travel; on the multivalent nature of the visitor place; and on the concept of specialness.

* * * *

Research questions and argument

Iona is a small, inhabited island in the Scottish Hebrides that is reputed for being, among other things, religious, chiefly through association with Scottish Christianity. It is also a thriving centre of tourism, with reportedly over 130,000 visitors making trips each year⁴. It has, in more recent years, shifted from being a primarily crofting (that is, farming) economy to one which is largely supported by tourism, though crofting practices still continue on the island. As a matter of course, then, Iona sits in between two spheres that have often been theorised as separate and, in some cases, contradictory: tourism and religion. And if Iona is at the intersection of **tourism and religion, Iona's visitors are excellent surrogates** through which this intersection can be closely studied. This guiding question of this thesis is, therefore, wilfully simple. It considers Iona as a case study for religion and tourism and applies what sociologist Erving Goffman identified as the chief question faced by any **individual attending to an unfolding situation: 'What is it that's going on here?'**⁵

⁴ While this number is widely reported and features on Iona's Community website, I have been unable to verify this statistic and the year that it was taken from. As a comparison, Glencoe visitor centre reported 199,727 visitors in 2016-2017. This made it the fifth most popular visitor destination in the Highlands and Islands area (under which Iona also falls). Sourced from VisitScotland, *Tourism in Scotland's Regions 2016*, p. 7

⁵ Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, Later Reprint edition, 1986), p. 8.

My rudimentary research question yielded a seemingly rudimentary answer: **‘specialness’**. This term was a recurring theme in respondent data collected during my fieldwork: the sense that Iona was special to some respondents, or that it was special for their family, or that it engendered a special feeling of stillness, or simply that it was a special island. In an important co-incidence of emic and etic usage, that same term - the special - had been theorised from a Religious Studies perspective by Ann Taves, who saw in the ‘special’ a possibility for theorising a **‘building-block’ approach to the study of religion**⁶. This, then, motivated the second question in this thesis: **‘why is specialness important to visitorship on Iona?’**

This thesis argues that Iona’s ‘specialness’ is a participatory narrative constructed by visitors to the island. For visitors, specialness functions as a way of mediating the various layers in Iona’s reputation, as a route through which visitors can construct and produce their own experience, and as a way of setting apart Iona itself and themselves within it. If visitorship is a practice of departure, specialness is a practice of arrival: of making homes and marking place. For scholars, specialness serves additional functions: as an important way of bridging scholarly categories (‘the etic’) and respondent language (‘the emic’), and as a way of widening the discussion on religion and tourism through the use of new vocabulary, and as a suitable and flexible framework to encourage comparative research across the secular-religious binary.

⁶ Ann Taves: *Religious Experienced Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to The Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

A note on vocabulary

The key challenge in this work has been the balance between the general (the study of a site within the context of religion and tourism) and the particular (the study of **specialness articulated by Iona's visitors**). The title of the work should clarify this: **there is no 'religion' in it and no 'tourism'**. Later chapters will show that this change of vocabulary reflects the difficulty in isolating 'religion' in a site seen to be 'religious', the difficulty in isolating the 'tourist' as a distinct category among other types of travellers, the difficulty in demarcating the 'religious' from the 'touristic' in any meaningful way. Therefore, this thesis' use of 'visitorship' and 'specialness' perform similar functions: visitorship subsumes and replaces the enquiry on tourism in the way that specialness subsumes and replaces the enquiry on religion. These lexical shifts facilitate the use of a more inclusive framework (of specialness) built from **'ground-up' using ethnographic data**. Consequently, this thesis is able to contribute in three distinct ways to the academic field: conceptually, theoretically, methodologically.

* * * *

Conceptual Contribution

The lineage for the term 'specialness' can be traced to the work of Ann Taves⁷. Adapting the work of Durkheim on the elementary forms of religion, Taves argued that **'special things' are the building blocks** of more complex formations like religion and spirituality. **'Specialness' for Taves is a broader and more generic term that can encapsulate other meanings**. Her argument - a fuller account of which is provided

⁷ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*. Taves herself provides a helpful summary of her position, pp. 161-165.

in chapter four - emphasises that this is not simply a shift in semantics (one word in place of another) **but a conceptual one: an acknowledgement that ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’, ‘magic’ and so on have fuzzy boundaries and should be seen as cognates, all caught up in a ‘generic web’ of specialness.** Taves reasons that specialness - like ‘religion’ - is not a *sui generis* category but is a product of ascription - a conscious or sub-conscious process by which people set apart certain things (ideal or anomalous things, in her view) from others. This produces a sliding scale of specialness where the degree to which a thing is set apart can indicate how special it is - the more prohibitions and taboos surrounding it (this is her use of Durkheim, and his understanding of the sacred as ‘set apart and protected by taboos⁸’), the more special it is seen to be.

This thesis uses Taves’ term but departs considerably from her Cognitive Science approach, placing human agency at the forefront of the study and using ethnographic data to re-construct the special. This is a conceptual contribution in two ways: first, in the building of a ‘situated’ category of the special using different ‘moving parts’ with considerable explanatory and comparative scope; second in using this category to modify the existing understanding of the ‘special’ as theorised by Ann Taves. This should make it evident that the fieldwork is not an attempt to transplant theory onto the ground; rather, it is an attempt to see how one particular field-site generates a concept of the ‘special’, and to then see the extent to which the internal logics of this construction are translatable. The **concept of the ‘special’**

⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1965 [1912]), p. 129.

in this thesis is, therefore, **'positioned' within Iona: it is a situated** study of specialness - as it is articulated by visitors to Iona.

To this end, this thesis will show how specialness on Iona is layered - bringing together the religious, spiritual, scenic, Romantic, rural, heritage, historic aspects of Iona variously. It will clarify the role of the visitor within this picture: as a producer of stories that synthesise the various layers of Iona. In this way, specialness **helps to 'locate' the visitor within a larger field of positioned meaning-making.** It will also show that special is relational, that it is borne of an interplay between people and place whereby both co-construct the other. Through the construction of specialness, the visitors can participate in the production of place. But this process has its limits: in that the category of the special can both be used to construct places but also reject them. In this way, specialness on Iona is selective, prioritising certain images (of solitude, of nostalgia, of untrammelled landscape, say) over others (cars, the construction of new houses, crowded beaches, bins). Finally, it will show how specialness works as a claim to belonging: that the various physical and imaginative acts that are required to construct it can be reframed as visitor **'labours', and that the ascription of specialness can then serve to dignify the visitor** and legitimise her place on Iona.

Taken as a whole, the data from Iona confirms some parts of Taves' thesis and modifies others. Chapter four will show, for instance, that the 'special' can allow us to rethink the binary between the 'sacred' and the 'profane', that it can allow us to capture other terms like 'religion', 'spirituality' and 'magic', and that it does indeed enable a smoother translation between visitor language and scholarly

categories. In that way, it is a versatile term, as Taves suggests. However, as chapter eight will **show, unlike Taves' conceptualisation** in which collective legitimisation is the key to the recognition of specialness for more complex constructions (like religion), the case of Iona highlights that specialness itself can provide legitimacy, and that the personal constructions of specialness can help to navigate collective settings by allowing the visitor to mark their own place in relation to others. This produces a much looser sense of the collective than Taves suggests. The second modification this **provides to Taves' theory is in its formulation of specialness as a 'heightened' category, explored in the conclusion. By showing the various kinds of 'setting apart' involved in the ascription of specialness by the visitor on Iona**, it shows how the coincidence of multiple layers of differentiation can build and heighten specialness. In this way it both confirms her thesis that the degree to which something is set apart indicates how special it is and demonstrates the potency of specialness in relation to ideal and anomalous things by considering how the island can be seen as both ideal-typical and anomalous.

In this way, the case of Iona can be more widely applied. Iona is not the only place reputed to be special: respondents in this thesis at various points comment on other places that are special to them (the south of Italy, Cornwall, Lindisfarne) and the discussions here offer comparative perspectives on a broad range of visitor places (Skye, Uist, the Lake District, Glastonbury, Rishikesh). By suggesting the special as produced through a combination of multiple interpretive layers: the situational, the spatial, the personal, this thesis can be used to study the special in these other contexts. Within a situational framework of visitorship, how might a concept of special be theorised in, say, Glastonbury, or Disneyland, or the Lake District? Would the contents of specialness on Iona (safety, connectedness and being out-of-time)

apply there? How could everyday acts of possession and gazing be translated and re-embedded in each of these three places? The advantage of my conceptualisation **of the special is that it comprises several ‘moving parts’** (form, content, process, function) which can be separated from each other and used for comparative study. By offering this structured analysis of the special that is both substantive (defined through features it possesses) as well as functional (defined by what it does), I hope to provide a useful point of departure for parallel studies, and to contribute a useable and malleable framework to the field of religion and tourism.

Theoretical Contribution

Earlier in this chapter, I identified that this thesis brings together three stands: the visitor, multivalent places and specialness. It does this using data derived from **immediate visitor experience. The word ‘immediate’ here functions as a temporal-spatial marker**, as a way of acknowledging that travel consists of various stages - planning and anticipation, making the journey, arriving at the destination, and recollecting the travel even after the return home⁹. In the context of this work, the **‘immediate’ experience of visitorship, then, translates to the actions and interactions that visitors have with Iona, on Iona**. In the tabular representation of the three **strands provided below, this strand is therefore named ‘personal’**. This should not be taken to imply that it is ‘private’ or even ‘individual’; it could read, instead, ‘biographical’ or even ‘immediate’ were it not for the implication that

⁹ Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure: The British Experience since 1500* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 170.

spatial and situational contexts are not both of those things. The choice of **‘personal’** is a pragmatic and convenient acknowledgement that this thesis builds larger frameworks from particular **respondent subjects**, and that visitorship **‘on-the-ground’** involves **subjective**, corporeal and imaginative engagements.

Personal	The experiences of the particular visitor to Iona
Spatial	The visitor 'place', and its material and metaphorical aspects
Situational	The context of visitorship, the position of the visitor

The situational strand covers the situational role of the visitor and of visitorship. Chapter two addresses the cultural meanings of travel and the register of available visitor categories and theories. Chapter three identifies the particular set of visitors **that make up this study**. Chapter four shows how Iona’s visitors are intertwined in its multivalent reputation. Chapters five through eight use the theoretical concepts alongside respondent data. I study, for instance: the role of the story as way of self-positioning (Chapter five); the application of *communitas*¹⁰ and social capital¹¹ in **the discussion on the connectedness of Iona (six)**; the role of the **‘gaze’**¹² as a means of differentiation (seven); the recourse to work as a means of dignifying travel (eight). Taken as a whole, the argument that this strand makes is that travelling is as much a practice of arrival as it is of departure, and that the position of the visitor

¹⁰ Victor Turner, **‘Liminality and Communitas’** in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1969), pp. 94-113.

¹¹ **Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’** in J. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York, Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

¹² John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London ; Sage Publications, 1990)

as a transient subject provides the necessary context for the construction of specialness as a means of belonging.

The spatial strand covers the notion of place. Chapter two addresses the importance of empirical work in the study of the visitor. Chapter three sets out the complex place of Iona, showing the various layers to its reputation and its **‘imaginative geography’**¹³. Chapter four demonstrates the implication of this **multivalence: showing the difficulty with and danger of focussing on ‘sacred space’** on Iona. The theoretical positions on place are then applied over the course of chapters five through eight. An indicative list of these applications reads: the island as a material and metaphorical construction (five); how the safety, connectedness **and the sense of being ‘out-of-time’ on Iona are created** through visitor-place interactions (six); landscapes as sites of possession (seven); the association between **belonging and dwelling in visitor places (eight)**. Taken together, this strand’s argument is that the multivalence of places and multiplicity of narratives about them makes specialness a valuable means of place-making.

The personal strand refers to the immediate experiences of the visitors to Iona. Chapter two accounts for some of the ways in which visitors have been theorised. Chapter three **demonstrates how the method of the ‘walking interview’** devised specifically for this project can capture the immediacy of visitor experience on Iona. Chapter four shows how visitors are useful surrogates in understanding the **complexity of Iona’s reputation**. Chapters five through eight show specific instances

¹³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

of respondent interactions with Iona as a way of building a wider repository of visitor engagement. These include: the role of ‘travel speaking’ and the various interlocutors in the conversation on specialness (five); the construction of ‘intimate’ knowledge of place (six); the ways in which body engagements such as running, gazing, resting, collecting stones construct specialness (seven); how and why visitor engagements with Iona enable the construction of Iona as home (eight). Taken together, this strand argues that these visitor engagements should be reframed as kinds of corporeal, imaginative and discursive work, and that this **notion of visitor labour can both clarify the constructed nature of Iona’s specialness,** and provide legitimacy for the visitor as a producer of place.

These strands are not to be read as mutually exclusive, nor are they monolithic. In fact, the contention this thesis makes is the importance of recognising the internal complexities of each and the ways in which they interact with each other. The **‘place’ studied in the spatial strand is not one ‘thing’: it is constructed through an** interplay of the material and the metaphorical; the nostalgia of a particular visitor when at the ruins of the Augustinian Nunnery in Iona must be contextualised within *both* the power of ruins to evoke memory¹⁴ and the presentation of Scotland by the **heritage industry as ‘a land out of time’¹⁵**. The layers are most explicitly connected to each other twice in this work. In chapter five, I argue how the situational importance of travel speaking, the rich spatial history of islands as sites for story-telling, and the use of stories as a form of self-composition allows us to see how

¹⁴ Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), p. 127.

¹⁵ David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely, *Scotland the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 200.

specialness can help visitors mediate **Iona's complex reputation and locate** themselves within it. In chapter eight I show how the situational fact of visitor transience, the importance of place-making within the visitor destination and the personal production of place through visitor labours come together to explain the value of specialness as a bid for legitimacy and belonging. Pushing the argument further still, I show how the situational set-apart-ness entailed in visitorship, the spatial set-apart-ness of the island and the personal set-apart-ness entailed by the **visitors' articulation and construction of specialness serves to heighten the category** itself. In this way, the complexity of each individual strand and their interrelationships comes together to give both a particular explanation for specialness as a descriptive visitor category on Iona, and specialness as an analytical framework with which to investigate other places of visitorship.

Methodological Contribution

There are not many full-length, ethnographic studies of contemporary visitor destinations originating from within the field of religion and tourism, not least because the field itself is relatively small¹⁶. This thesis, with its close engagement with rich data taken from qualitative interviews and observations, its use of a variety of ethnographic reporting: journal extracts, interview extracts and **photographic material, and its use of 'thick description'**¹⁷ that aims to capture the sensory, corporeal and immediate nature of visitor experience, is well poised to

¹⁶ The next chapter will clarify that while the field itself is relatively small, it has the advantage - **as an 'in-between' field** - of drawing from a wide variety of other disciplines.

¹⁷ **The term is that of Clifford Geertz. 'Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture' in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* 3 (1973): 143-168.**

meet that absence. Its most distinctive contributions, however, are in its use of three methodological approaches when conducting site-specific research of this nature. **First, in its use of the ‘walking interview’: a format devised specifically for this project. The ‘walking interview’, conducted with twenty seven respondents** (a little less than half of the total number of respondents interviewed) - consisted of a semi-structured interview format with three modifications: the respondent was asked to choose a place on the island to walk to; the interview was conducted and recorded during the walk and included any breaks or stops made during it; the respondent was given a camera to use during the walk to take photographs. On account of this, I was able to collect not just auditory recordings (which were then transcribed) but also visual material (the photographs that respondents took) and supplementary information such as what routes were more popular, how different respondents who picked the same place might respond to it, and so on. By providing a fuller account of this method in chapter three, and by showing through illustration how exactly it can be helpful, I hope to offer a new and creative method for conducting site-specific research for questions that require a deeper engagement with sensory, corporeal and immediate data.

The second distinctive methodological contribution that this thesis can make is in **its attention to ‘travel speaking’**. Academic work in travel writing as well as in tourism, empire and geography (among others) has frequently acknowledged the importance of travel writers in the construction of knowledge: in the popularisation of places, in shaping the external representation of places, as surrogates in enacting

imperial agendas¹⁸. Travel speaking has, in comparison, been neglected. This is a reflection of a wider problem of the undervaluation of the vernacular and the oral **with academic departments dominated by ‘elite, written, Western literary traditions and texts’**¹⁹. By studying the role of stories in the construction of the island (chapter five), showing how the construction of specialness is also a bid for **linguistic capital (chapter seven), and by emphasising the ‘of-the-moment’**²⁰ speaking of visitors to Iona, this thesis recognises the importance of orality, sociability and relationality in travel experiences. It shows that acts of speaking can be a way to exert possession over places and can transform them into sites of dwelling. Travel speaking is, then, an important way to break the domination of the textual in the understanding of contemporary, lived-upon places, and a way in which to represent underrepresented subjects.

Finally, this thesis demonstrates the role of ‘subordinate’ and ‘experiential’ knowledge²¹ in the conduct of ethnographic research. Chapter three outlines my **position on Iona: as a ‘visitor-among-visitors’, as an itinerant subject on the island** moving (deliberately) between different places of accommodation, and as occupier of five roles that can be seen as lower in status (young; Indian; female; student; unskilled worker). Taken together, these suggest certain resonances between the role of the ethnographer and the role of the visitor, especially for this project. As an ethnography of visitorship written by a visitor, this text is itself part of the visitor

¹⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); Graham Dann, *Language of Tourism: a sociolinguistic perspective* (Wallingford: Cab International, 1996); Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*

¹⁹ Richard Bauman, *Story, performance and event: Contextual studies of oral narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 1.

²⁰ **The term here is Alex Norman’s to describe his own fieldwork in Rishikesh and Santiago.** See Alex Norman, *Spiritual Tourism* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011),

²¹ These are Renato Rosaldo’s terms. See *Culture and Truth*, p. 193.

discourse on the specialness of Iona. This, along my fieldwork practices of mobility, participation and ethnographic writing can be used to tease out questions about the relationship between ethnographer and subject. They are a way of recognising that **the ethnographer is ‘a positioned subject, not a blank slate, and second, that the objects of social analysis are also analysing subjects whose perceptions must be taken nearly as seriously as “we” take our own.’**²²

* * * *

Thesis structure

This is broadly **a work of two ‘halves’**. The first sets up the context for the enquiry (chapters two-four); the second develops a situated study of the special on Iona as a response (five-eight). The first half does more theoretical and contextual **‘groundwork’** and while fieldwork data is used throughout, it is worked with in more detail in chapters five-eight. Chapters One and Nine serve as the introduction and conclusion, respectively.

The next chapter (Chapter Two) works as a review of the literature on the traveller, and the field of religion and tourism. Setting up the tourist as a figure encumbered **by a long history of moral and cultural ‘baggage’**, it addresses the nexus of cultural, social and economic relations that compose this baggage, showing how the study of the tourist has developed in response. It then looks at the field of religion and

²² Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, p. 207.

tourism, highlighting the problem of using co-constructed binaries (religion/tourism, tourist/pilgrim) and questioning their ready associations (religion as sacred; tourism as secular). It argues the need for more dynamic categories, and for the need to situate the use of categories within defined spatial-temporal contexts. In this way, it sets up its own enquiry on the concept of specialness, in the context of visitorship, on the island of Iona.

Chapter Three **accounts for the ethnography from which this thesis' argument has** been built. It offers an account of Iona, clarifying its status as a multivalent place: a site of multiple meaning. This multivalence underlines the usefulness of a visitor **as a surrogate through which to study the 'specialness' of the island. The chapter** then clarifies the ethnographic method used: providing an account of the respondents, of my own positionality, of the methods used in the field. It shows **how these come together to produce a 'data set' that is richly descriptive, multi-**sited, highly situated and well-poised to study the sensory and immediate nature of visitor experience on the island.

Chapter Four **marks a 'turning point' in the thesis. Here, I bring together the** material addressed in chapters two and three and demonstrate why the existing literature in religion and tourism cannot fully account for the complexity of Iona. It identifies a two-fold problem with the **'religion and tourism' framework on Iona:** first, the widely-noted difficulty of applying scholarly **concepts (like 'sacred space')** on the ground; second, the site-specific danger of continuing an asymmetrical representation of Iona through a neglect of its other meanings and histories. As a **response, it advocates a shift from the 'religious' and 'religion' to the 'special' and**

‘specialness’. Looking to Ann Taves’ work on specialness as a building block for religion, it shows how this concept can help to solve the problems addressed in this chapter. By diffusing the binary between the sacred and the profane and then by bridging the gap between scholarly literature and emic language, it allows us to consider Iona as a multivalent site. The chapter clarifies that this thesis aims to build a situated concept of the special from the bottom up, out of the particular field site of Iona. **It is not, in other words, an attempt to transplant Taves’ theory** onto the ground from the top down. By outlining the key points of departure from **Taves’ theory and introducing visitor narratives of specialness, it begins the enquiry** that develops over the second half of the thesis.

With the orienting concept of the thesis having been introduced, the thesis’ second half is dedicated to studying its various ‘moving parts’.

Chapter Five sets up the interaction between the material and the metaphorical that will run through the thesis. It clarifies **that the ‘specialness’ analysed in this thesis is not an ontological category** and offers visitor stories as a useful key to accessing the concept of the special. It locates Iona within the imaginative and topographic layers of the island and **posits Iona as a ‘storied’ place**. Working through particular respondent stories, it argues that stories allow visitors to interact with **and navigate Iona’s complex reputation, and to** compose themselves within it. It shows how story-telling is closely linked with place, and in this way, the role of the visitor as story-teller anticipates the role of the visitor as producer.

Chapter Six **identifies some of the characteristics variously attached to Iona's** specialness (safety, connectedness and a sense of being out of time) in a bid to develop an *emic* vocabulary of specialness. It shows how each of these different elements are understood by visitors, why they are important to the context of travel in general and how they are applied to Iona in specific. It underlines that these elements can work with and reinforce the other, and that they represent and in turn construct the material and the metaphorical dimensions of Iona. In this way, **Iona's specialness is shown to be interactive: borne out of a co-constructive and** affective relationship between people and place.

Chapter Seven develops this theme of interactivity. It argues that the special is constructed through processes of gazing and possession by visitors to Iona. It shows how particular visitor acts (taking photographs, collecting stones, walking around the island, trading stories) can become ways in which the visitor participates in the everyday life of the island. The chapter also outlines a tension between different **interpretations of Iona. It shows how the visitor 'gaze' involves selections but also** rejections and how it creates a curious relationship between specialness and secrecy; similarly, it shows that visitor narratives of possession may be structured around an absence of formal claims to possession. In this way, specialness brings contests of its own while showing that it is, above all, produced through effort.

Chapter Eight gathers the material on the special described in the three earlier **chapters and applies it alongside the widespread visitor narrative of Iona as 'home'.** It shows the consonance between this idea of 'home' and the form, contents and process of construction of the special. By sharing stories, by emphasising the

qualities of safety, connectedness and not being bound by mainland ‘time’, by seeking participation in the everyday through new ways of seeing and possessing Iona, visitors **emphasise the familiarity of Iona: making it a suitable ‘home’ for themselves. Visitors use ‘home-making’ in order to inscribe legitimate places for themselves in a multivalent site.** In the way that story-telling, gazing and practices of possession help visitors to gain legitimacy and capital, the ascription of specialness can then be read as a bid for belonging in a place where belonging is contested. In this way, the layeredness, the interactivity, the selectiveness and the participatory nature of the special can be held together. Chapter eight makes one final recommendation: that the construction of the special by visitors to Iona be **reframed as ‘work’.** This conception is key to how visitors ‘set apart’ their own relationships with Iona and, for the scholar, it affirms the visitor as a producer of place as she navigates her situational, spatial and personal setting - the three strands of this project - on Iona.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis. It poses an important challenge: how to generalise from and widely apply a study as specific as this? As an answer, it revisits **the three strands that run through this thesis to argue that Iona’s ‘specialness’ is** both particular to it, and not. It shows that the coincidence of visitorship as a liminal state, the island as a visitor setting, and the affective and participatory sense of the personal ascription of specialness, produces co-existing layers of ‘set apart’ things. This **stacking of various kinds of ‘setting-apart’ creates a *heightened*** category of specialness on Iona. It details both site-specific and general implications of this work. With this, the orienting concept of this work is shown to have wider applicability but, simultaneously, a particular potency when situated within *this* fieldwork site.

2. 'Placing' this thesis I: Academic Context

In its original conception, this was a study of religion and tourism using Iona as a **'case study'**. In its evolved form, it is a study of the **descriptive-analytical** category of the special as it used by visitors to Iona. **It studies not 'tourists' but 'visitors'; 'visitorship' not 'tourism'; 'specialness', not 'religion'.** This chapter accounts for the first of these departures. It works through the ways in which the tourist has been theorised, showing that the category is often co-constructed with cognate forms such as the **'traveller'**. In this way, the lexical term **'tourist'** is shown to have a host of accumulated rhetorical baggage. The second section investigates some **broad issues in the hybrid field of 'religion and tourism'**. It shows that while the field has inherited many available formulations of the tourist, the application of some constituent terms (**'religion', 'pilgrimage'**) often sits at odds with the work on tourism. It shows how situated, empirical studies can test the binaries of tourist and pilgrim and disentangle the ready associations between tourism and the secular, and pilgrimage and religion. In this way, it justifies its study of the dynamic and inclusive category of visitorship, and its positioning within a highly situated context.



Figure 2.1 | 'Tourists' in sculpture

Left: Duane Hanson, 'Tourists' (1970, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art); Right: 'Tourists II' (1988, Saatchi Collection)

'I am a traveller, you are a tourist, he is a tripper', reads an epigraph in one of most influential works in the field of tourism²³. Attributed to author and playwright Keith Waterhouse, it is a pithy statement on two issues surrounding the discourses of travel: the multiplicity of different forms of travel and the implied differences between them. We see three of these possible forms in the three identifiers used: the traveller, the tourist and the [day] tripper. Each involves a movement of people **from one place to another with the intention to return, but Waterhouse's** formulation implies subtle distinctions between these different identities. **Specifically, in the speaker's ordering of the 'traveller', 'tourist' and 'tripper' in** relation to herself, Waterhouse indicates a hierarchy within these types. The traveller is the identity that the speaker would like to assume; the tourist is an identity the speaker grants to the (second) person she addresses, and the tripper is

²³ Sourced from Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. vii.

the farthest removed from the speaker, reflected in the use of the third-person pronoun. This arrangement reveals a cultural politics - by choosing the label 'traveller', the speaker dignifies it, and, by extension, dignifies herself by identifying with it. By the same token, 'tourist' is implied to be inferior to 'traveller', and to be a day tripper is deemed even less worthy. The quotation appears in an early work in the study of tourism, by sociologist John Urry. The work - *The Tourist Gaze*- was one of several published in the late decades of the twentieth century to acknowledge and contest a prevalent attitude of suspicion or scorn towards tourism, and to be part, later, of a new wave of scholarship that dignified the tourist subject and her tourism.

* * * *

The much-maligned tourist

The tourist entered the realm of cultural theory as stereotypically 'bad' tourists enter a site: brashly, with baggage, and amidst a cloud of disapproving looks from genteel publics. We can see this disapproval in the 1961 work of Daniel Boorstin, an American social historian, and one of the earliest commentators on the tourist subject. Boorstin writes,

The traveller, then, was working at something; the tourist was a pleasure-seeker. The traveller was active; he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive, he expects interesting things to happen to him. He goes 'sight-seeing'.²⁴

Boorstin's work was a social critique of American public life in the late 1950s and early 1960s. America, according to Boorstin, was labouring under the 'menace of

²⁴ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: a guide to pseudo-events in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961) p. 85.

unreality'²⁵ where representation had replaced reality. He termed this condition **'hyperreality'** and termed as **'pseudo-events'** the various productions of this reality. Boorstin saw tourists as passive and undiscerning, fascinated by **'pseudo-events'** and superficial **'sights'**, as clearly shown in the passage quoted. Continuing this formulation of passivity, Boorstin criticised the various instruments of tourism, calling **guidebooks 'up-to-date scripts for actors on the tourists' stage'**²⁶, criticising the artificiality of tourist places and products. Boorstin applied these same critiques to other fields of public life too, expressing his disenchantment with journalism, for instance, where **'more and more news events become dramatic performances in which "men in the news" simply act out more or less well their prepared script'**²⁷. Tourism, that is, was part of a wider trend in which purer forms of engagement were replaced, steadily, with hollow cousins, what Jean Baudrillard might term **'simulacra'**²⁸.

Boorstin was in no way a lone voice. 'I hate travelling and explorers,' Claude Lévi-Strauss had declared at the start of his 1955 memoirs²⁹. Robert Putnam notes that tourism, and indeed leisure in general, was viewed suspiciously in the 1960s in America and cites a study conducted in 1958 in (ironically) the Centre for the Study of Leisure at the University of Chicago, stating that **'the most dangerous threat hanging over American society is the threat of leisure'**³⁰. American artist Duane

²⁵ Boorstin, *The Image*, p. 57.

²⁶ Boorstin, *The Image*, pp. 104-105.

²⁷ Boorstin, *The Image*, p. 127.

²⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

²⁹ C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* [trans. D. Weightman and J. Weightman], (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 17.

³⁰ Sourced from Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), p. 16.

Hanson produced a wry series of life-size sculptures in the 1970s and 1980s (**'Tourists'**), as a comment on the then portrayal of tourists. Two images from the series are included at the start of this section: two sets of couples, in **'holiday gear'**, staring expectantly into the distance, bedecked with paraphernalia: cameras, bags, pouches, sunglasses, binoculars. They provide a neat accompaniment to an observation by Erik Cohen - a scholar whose work has been instrumental in the elevation of the tourist subject: that the tourist was most often portrayed both in academic scholarship and in popular culture as a **'slightly funny, quaintly dressed, camera-toting foreigner, ignorant, passive, shallow and gullible'**³¹. In *The Tourist*, the first full-length work dedicated to the study of tourists from a social-scientific point of view, author Dean MacCannell acknowledges the uneven treatment meted out to its primary subject of study³². **What Urry does with Waterhouse's quotation, MacCannell does by referencing a joke: 'What is an attacking force without guns? Tourists'**³³.

Commenting on this strand in the representation of tourists, Christopher Tilley notes a curious kind of oblivion, even self-hatred. He writes that there is something **'deeply disingenuous about much of the critical literature on tourism...in that we can be sure that the self-same critics are, have been, and will be tourists, travellers or post-tourist cynics.'**³⁴ **'Nobody really wants to be a tourist'**, Julia Harrison writes, referring to the deep embarrassment of the tourist at being confronted by her

³¹ E. Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change* (Boston: Elsevier Science Ltd, 2004), p. 17.

³² Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1989 [1976])

³³ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p.xxiv

³⁴ Christopher Tilley, **'Performing Culture in the Global Village'** in *Critique of Anthropology* 17:1 (1997), p. 75.

counterparts and her determination to extricate herself from them³⁵. By the close of her work, she turns this embarrassment inward, asking the reader: **‘we have all been tourists or travellers at some point in our lives, [so] why are we so disparaging of the experience?’**³⁶

The layered critique of the tourist

For this, we must consider the historical, cultural, economic nexus within which the **‘tourist’ as a discrete category became sensible. Here, we can look to James Clifford’s observation about the relational fashioning of traveller categories**³⁷.

Clifford writes that while travel as a practice has a long history (the explorations of the sixteenth century, the Grand Tours in the seventeenth and so on), a particular notion of travel was evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which was constructed in relation to tourism. These discourses of travel came from **particular elite conceptions of ‘sophisticated’ travel which saw tourism, in contrast, as ‘a practice defined as incapable of producing serious knowledge’**³⁸. In this way, Clifford also teases out the role of nostalgia in the discourse on travel: on how the denigration of the tourist subject may be contextualised within an idealisation of other forms of travel that came before. Alexandra Peat sees tourists as readily available targets in this **expression of nostalgia, observing it in Paul Fussell’s**

³⁵ Julia Harrison, *Being a Tourist: Finding Meaning in Pleasure Travel* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), p. 4.

³⁶ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 205.

³⁷ Clifford, *Routes*, p. 65.

³⁸ Clifford, *Routes*, p. 65.

statement that ‘before tourism there was travel, and before travel there was exploration’.³⁹

What was the nostalgia for? Taking our cue from Fussell, we can look back to earlier conventions of travel, notably the seventeenth century tradition of the Grand Tour in which members of the English elite travelled to Europe, to witness the legacy of Renaissance culture⁴⁰. The Grand Tourist represented an ideal type of traveller, frequently linked with discourses of masculinity and self-improvement⁴¹. This was seen as travel for the purpose of betterment, undertaken with rigour and characterised by curiosity and whole-hearted engagement. The tourist was not seen to encapsulate those same values, to a large part **because, at this time, ‘tourist’ largely meant ‘Mass Tourist’** - those who benefited from the democratisation of tourism through the provision of package tours and affordable holidays. The Mass Tourist was seen to be travelling in a throng, passive in her engagement, lazy in her choices, unaware or incapable of appreciating the intrinsic worth of the places she was visiting⁴².

If this is one explanation for the differentiation of the ‘tourist’ from the ‘traveller’, a study of the contexts within which these occurred explains its potency. In his

³⁹ Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 38.

⁴⁰ John Towner, ‘The Grand Tour: a key phase in the history of tourism’ in *Annals of Tourism Research* 12: 3 (1985).

⁴¹ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-century Britain: essays on gender, family, and empire* (Pearson Education, 2005).; Chloe Chard, ‘Women Who Transmute into Tourist Attractions: Spectator and Spectacle on the Grand Tour’ in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*, p.109-26.

⁴² Jim Butcher, *The Moralisation of Tourism: Sun, Sand... and Saving the World?* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 34-45.

history of leisure in Britain, Peter Borsay writes that the widening of the middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain created new forms of competition between and within social classes⁴³. Borsay likens leisure to a form **of cultural capital, using Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of cultural capital as an** acquired set of resources and coded behaviours that work to gain or consolidate social status.⁴⁴ He considers these in light of other changes taking place in this period: the introduction and popularisation of travel by rail, the emergence of **'package tours' offered by Thomas Cook, the growing involvement of the State in 'leisure' activities, the expansion in the 'middle class' due to the generation of** wealth from industrial activity⁴⁵.

For Borsay, these changes meant a loosening of the stronghold that the upper classes had held on leisure -and, therefore, cultural capital. The possibility for acquiring capital - through social mixing, the cultivation of tastes, and the observance of leisure - was opened up for the bourgeoisie, and the pursuit of the travel, then, became contests over cultural capital. John Urry - whose use of **Waterhouse's quotation opened this chapter** - makes a similar argument, tying in cultural and social class to a competing idea of aesthetics⁴⁶. He relates the decline of British seaside resorts such as Brighton and Blackpool to a reactionary sentiment whereby the middle-class moved to other preferred holiday spots because the influx of mass tourists were seen to be spoiling the places. He embeds this class-based

⁴³ Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure: The British Experience since 1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p. 80

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in John Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

⁴⁵ For a general overview of changes in this period: Borsay, *A History of Leisure*; for Scotland in particular: John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750*, pp. 91-101.

⁴⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, pp. 74-75.

aesthetics in the influential formulation of a ‘tourist gaze’: a cultivated way of presenting places. Here the ‘Romantic’ gaze - privileging nature and solitude - typifies the way of looking encouraged by Victorian ideals of travel contrasts while the ‘Collective’ gaze that thrives on spectacle and crowds typifies the attractions for the Mass Tourist.

In his monumental work on the English working class, E.P. Thompson relates the attitudes towards leisure in the early 1900s to the influence of Methodism in England which he credits with the ‘loss of leisure in which to play and the repression of playful impulses’. He traces the denigration of rural fairs and dances in the period to the popularity of Methodist ideas, referencing John Wesley’s instruction to ‘avoid all lightness, as you would avoid hell-fire; and trifling, as you would cursing and swearing.’⁴⁷ He argues that the Methodist conception of discipline lent well to industrial Britain, and that it worked to extend order across a variety of areas: the factory, the Sunday school, the family and, indeed, the exercise of leisure⁴⁸.

Consider, in this instance, economist Thorstein Veblen’s work on leisure and consumption⁴⁹. For Veblen consumption was not simply an economic necessity but a social and cultural process, and the consumption of certain kinds of goods were bids for honour, or status⁵⁰. This is how he sees leisure: as a privileged kind of consumption, only within reach of the wealthy. In this way, Veblen allows us to see

⁴⁷ Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin Books, 1963). p. 448.

⁴⁸ Thompson, *The Making of*, p. 442

⁴⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of institutions* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1899) p. 22.

⁵⁰ Veblen, *The Theory of*, p. 225-26.

how Methodist ideas about leisure and consumption, and aesthetic ideas about suitable holiday spots are both selective: critical of certain types of leisure, but not others. In Veblen's scheme the value of leisure is derived from its unproductiveness; it is a mark of status because it is only the wealthy who can afford to 'not work'. Consequently, 'abstention from labour [was] the conventional evidence of wealth and [was] therefore the conventional mark of social standing,'⁵¹. Given this association between leisure, social standing and wealth, we can see the practice of leisure as a means of placing oneself within broader class structures and acquiring new forms of cultural capital.

In fact, the idea of the implied passivity of tourist consumption persists in a number of different works. Boorstin had called guidebooks 'up-to-date scripts for actors on the tourists' stage'⁵², working as he was with his formulation of the passive tourist. But the idea of the 'script' can also be seen in Graham Dann's work on the 'tourist register' that is commonly employed and expected when writing and speaking about travel⁵³. MacCannell seems to suggest something similar to this when he writes about the 'standardiz[ed] arrangements' that tourists use to describe their encounters with the site ('When I saw it for the first time...')⁵⁴. Jim Butcher notes that the popular Lonely Planet Guide was referred to in Alex Garland's 1996 novel *The Beach*, as 'The Book', which 'conjures up an image of the backpackers following religiously the instructions from this "higher authority"- travelling where The Book recommends, staying where The Book decrees and generally acting as a discipline

⁵¹ Veblen, *The Theory of*, pp. 40-41.

⁵² Boorstin, *The Image*, pp. 104-105.

⁵³ Dann, *The Language of Tourism*, pp. 211-219.

⁵⁴ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 136.

of the new religion of travel'⁵⁵. When taken to a more extreme point, the logical conclusion seems to be that the degree of control exercised by these mediators tend to homogenise the tourist experience. The 'tour' itself becomes a commodity and 'what tourists are buying, primarily, are experiences.'⁵⁶ This is reminiscent of Adorno and Horkheimer's formulation of 'the culture industry' which creates and subsists on a conformist and obedient mass⁵⁷. In tourism studies in particular, we can see the application of this idea of homogeneity in the development of the 'McDonaldization' and 'Disneyfication' approach to the industry⁵⁸. Kaelber argues that McDonaldization (George Ritzer's term) results in the provision of similar services and amenities through a replicable model by privileging efficiency, predictability and convenience; Disneyfication achieves this through the application of familiar themes to unfamiliar places (American-themed diners, themed hotels) and by suggesting how the tourist should experience a particular commodity or event. Taken together, the many layers - economic, religious, cultural, social - that contribute to the formulation of the 'tourist' should make it evident that the critique is not simply lexical. Nor are they 'in the past'. The literature provides a layered critique that comes with a host of accumulated meaning.: In this way, the discourse on tourism, then, becomes a discourse on competing economic, moral, social, cultural and aesthetic sensibilities⁵⁹.

⁵⁵ Butcher: *The Moralisation of Tourism*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Arthur Asa Berger, *Deconstructing Travel: Cultural Perspectives on Tourism* (California: Altamira Press, 2004), p.14.

⁵⁷ Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' in Adorno and Horkheimer (eds). *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Verso classics edn; London: Verso, 1997), p. 131.

⁵⁸ George Ritzer and Alan Liska, 'McDisneyization and Post-tourism: Complementary perspectives on contemporary tourism' in Rojek and Urry (ed) *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 98.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Craik, 'The Culture of Tourism' in *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory* 1 (1997), p. 118

Tourism in its bare bones

While the category of tourism, we have seen, has generated a range of rhetoric, there have been some basic agreements - among tourism theorists - as to its skeletal **structure. Daniel H. Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy write that ‘simply speaking, a tourist is someone who travels temporarily (at least 24 hours but less than a year) away from home to another region.’**⁶⁰ They note that this broad-stroke definition is shared, to a large extent, by theorists of tourism, government agencies and public bodies in charge of operational tourism as well as by larger organisations such as the United Nations **World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). The UNWTO’s definition, levies three criteria. It states that tourism proceeds ‘outside the usual environment’** of the tourist; that it must be longer than an overnight stay but less than a year **(after which time, the visited destination qualifies for becoming the ‘usual environment’)**; that while it need not be for ‘leisure’ strictly, it must not involve remuneration at the destination⁶¹. Some of these criteria are replicated in other **definitions of tourism: the notion that tourism is ‘temporary and seasonal,’**⁶² that it is for non-instrumental purposes⁶³ and that it involves departures or ‘limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life’⁶⁴. This idea of departures has been particularly instructive to tourism with Urry proposing a number of different kinds of separation: **that tourism is set apart from ‘regular and**

⁶⁰ Dallen H. Timothy and Daniel Olsen (eds.), *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*. Vol. 4 (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.

⁶¹ Sourced from Michael Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism: Crossroads, Destinations, and Encounters* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 7.

⁶² **Boris Vukonić**, *Tourism and Religion* (Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing, 1996), p. 33

⁶³ Erik Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*

⁶⁴ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

organised work'; that it involves movement of people to a 'new place or places'; that tourist experiences involve distinct forms of engagement with senses or with scale; that tourist experiences are separate from everyday experience and 'out of the ordinary.'⁶⁵ Graburn sees tourism as a departure from the familiar, the ordinary and - using Durkheim's binary - the profane (we will take this up later)⁶⁶.

This idea of departure is central to the work of MacCannell - a sociologist instrumental in the rehabilitation of the tourist. Like Boorstin, MacCannell locates the tourist firmly within modernity, stating that the tourist represents the 'quintessentially modern subject', and that to carry out an excavation of this subject is to carry out an excavation of modernity itself⁶⁷. For MacCannell, the tourist's relationship to her context is one of disenchantment and alienation. MacCannell locates tourism as the prerogative of a 'leisure class': predominantly middle class, pleasure-seeking, mobile and modern. This particular figure's primary search is for authenticity. And it is this search that 'condemn[s] [him] to look elsewhere, everywhere, for his authenticity, to see if he can catch a glimpse of it reflected in the simplicity, poverty, chastity or purity of others.'⁶⁸ MacCannell works closely with Erving Goffman's theorisation of 'regions' as bounded sites - where the 'front' region is the site of performance, where codes of decorum apply, and the 'back' region - hidden from view - is where decorum can be lifted or subverted.⁶⁹ MacCannell posits that tourist sites are places of staged authenticity, where places

⁶⁵ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, pp. 2-3

⁶⁶ H. H. Nelson Graburn, 'Tourism: The Sacred Journey' in V. Smith (ed.) *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 23.

⁶⁷ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 2

⁶⁸ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 40

⁶⁹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Monograph No. 2.* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), pp. 65-69.

are presented as authentic to the tourist, with the facts of the presentation occluded from view.⁷⁰ The back region is, for MacCannell - the realm of the **authentic**; and in arguing that tourists can often be granted entry to 'a back region [that] is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation...' ⁷¹, he renders improbable his own subject's quest.

MacCannell's portrayal of the tourist has been influential in its recognition of the cultural meanings attached to the **project of travel**. And yet, if Boorstin's portrayal **encumbered the tourist with negative meaning**, MacCannell's framing of the tourist as a modern seeker or a secular pilgrim has been seen to overstate the reliance on authenticity, too. Harrison writes that her work on Canadian tourists suggested **sociability, not authenticity, as a primary motivation for travel** and that 'tourists anticipate, and desire, connection.' ⁷² She also dissociates 'authenticity' from 'realness', by noting one of her respondents report of a meeting with an "an old bushy" she had met during her holiday in Australia. Harrison writes: 'Whether this man had ever really worked in the Australian bush was incidental to her [the respondent]. He told the stories well; he made life in the bush **seem real**.' ⁷³ This is **what Maxine Feifer might call a 'post tourist': a subject who interacts knowingly** with her context of modernity through irony and playful engagement⁷⁴. Likewise, Coleman and Crang use the idea of presentation itself to query authenticity. Orienting their study of tourist places around the idea of performance, they argue **that tourist 'presentation' and 'reality' are not inconsistent and acknowledge the**

⁷⁰ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 101.

⁷¹ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 101.

⁷² Harrison, *Being A Tourist*, p. 90.

⁷³ Harrison, *Being A Tourist*, p. 129

⁷⁴ Maxine Feifer, *Going Places: The Ways of the Tourist from Imperial Rome to the Present Day* (London: MacMillan, 1985).

ideological wielding of ‘authenticity’ as a way of dismissing places and cultures as ‘less “real” or “merely” discursive’⁷⁵.

Erik Cohen, a prolific theorist in the field of tourism, notes that ‘as in every polemic, however, the protagonists of the opposing views tend to overstate their case’, and suggests that we must be as cautious of accepting without reservation Boorstin’s harsh dismissal of the tourist subject as we must of MacCanell’s ideal-typical creation of the tourist as a seeker of authenticity⁷⁶. This is the spirit in which he theorises tourism not through one singular tourist ‘type’ but through five possible modes of tourism. For Cohen, at the heart of all tourism is a ‘quest for the centre’, a quest that is based on the understanding that all travelling for pleasure - which is how he differentiates the project of tourism - is founded on a recognition ‘that there is some experience available “out there”, which cannot be found within the life-space, and which makes travel worthwhile.’⁷⁷ He observes, however, that tourists may define their ‘centre’ differently, and the degree to which their tourism is a quest for the centre may be different, too. These are the criteria he uses to distinguish between five different modes of tourist experiences, arranged in relation to the tourist’s relationship to the centre: the recreational mode, the diversionary mode, the experiential mode, the experimental mode and the existential mode.

⁷⁵ Simon Coleman and Mike Crang, ‘Grounded Tourists, Travelling Theory’ in Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (Eds.), *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002, p. 7.

⁷⁶ Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*, p. 180.

⁷⁷ Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*, p. 182

As Graham Dann notes in his socio-**linguistic study of tourism**, **Cohen's understanding** of tourist modes has played a large part in recognising that all tourism does not take place for the same purpose⁷⁸. It continues the project of dignifying the tourist by recognising a diversity of experience. His later research continued in the same vein, with him theorising other kinds of tourism: educational, adventurous, and ludic (or playful)⁷⁹. **However, he nonetheless adheres to MacCannell's model of the 'quest'** in order to theorise his subject: defining tourism according to motivation. The recreational mode is used by the tourist who seeks enjoyment and escapism; the experiential mode **valorises authenticity and most resembles that of MacCannell's**. Finally, the experimental mode values alternative centres and is, eventually, a **search for the traveller's own internal centre, all of which remain unfound**. In **Cohen's words, the experimental mode is 'an essentially religious quest, but diffuse and without a clearly set goal.'**⁸⁰

A lexicon of available identities

The current lexicon of tourism gives us several typologies and modes of the tourist **to work with: Boorstin's uncritical consumer, MacCannell's authenticity seeker, Cohen's five modes of tourists and then his adventurous, ludic, educational tourists, Maxine Feifer's post-tourist**. These are relational identities, often based on motivations for travel. The value of this range of proposed identities is that they have helped to expand the understanding of the tourist - even if the tourist is still entangled within the rhetorical field in which she began. We can also note that most

⁷⁸ Graham Dann, *The Language of Tourism: a Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Oxon: Cab International, 1996), p. 40.

⁷⁹ E. Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism: Diversity and Change* (Boston: Elsevier Science Ltd, 2004).

⁸⁰ E. Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*, pp. 71-79.

scholars have used their particular ‘type’ of tourist to investigate broader cultural and social structures. John Urry uses the heritage-seeker, to study class and the role of the state in the shape of the gaze⁸¹; Julia Harrison’s traveller in search of intimacy allows her to study the way in which Canadian tourists negotiate their senses of home and away⁸²; Jim Butcher uses the increasingly (and, in his view, disingenuously) ‘moral’ tourist, to critique wider cultures of hyper-moralisation and the tensions within moral-ethical codes in the context of tourism⁸³. In this way, the tourist subject can work as a surrogate to study larger worlds, and the boundaries between them.

* * * *

Tourism and Religion

The field of tourism and religion is both emergent and not. Michael Stausberg notes the paucity of works in this field while acknowledging the prolific writing on tourism, religion, religion within the context of tourism, and on tourism in the context of religion⁸⁴. The area so far has four full-length works devoted specifically to the intersection between religion and tourism, **with Stausberg’s own work providing the most expansive survey of its theoretical issues. Boris Vukonić works on religious tourism and its benefits (we will take this up in detail later). Daniel H. Olsen and Dallen J. Timothy edited a volume that looked at some of the theoretical points of contact between religion and tourism and provided case studies that focused on the particular doctrinal position in various religions towards travel**

⁸¹ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*

⁸² Harrison, *Being a Tourist*

⁸³ Butcher, *The Moralisation of Tourism*

⁸⁴ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 9-11

practices. Finally, Alex Norman's 2011 work is dedicated to studying one particular intersectional figure within religion and tourism - the 'spiritual tourist'.

An 'in-between' field

Despite having only generated a clutch of full-length works, 'tourism and religion' has nonetheless benefitted from a wide range of vocabulary and scholarship across both fields. Many relevant concepts in the area sit 'in between' fields: for example sacred space, pilgrimage, authenticity. Moreover, both the study of tourism and the study of religion themselves have a long history of interdisciplinarity. The review of the traveller-subject in the previous section, for instance, worked with theories from historians (Borsay), economists (Veblen), sociologists (Bourdieu), and anthropologists (Harrison). Likewise, the various theorists of religion used in this thesis themselves acknowledge the importance of interdisciplinarity to their work: Ann Taves uses Durkheim's sociological approach along with her own Cognitive Science framework⁸⁵; Kim Knott uses the work of geographer Doreen Massey and philosopher Henri Lefebvre to theorise place⁸⁶; and Alex Norman's work combines ethnographic method with sociological and anthropological examination⁸⁷. The religion and tourism nexus today sees contributions from theorists of variously: tourism, religion, culture, heritage, landscape, pilgrimage, spirituality, space, travel, leisure, performance, visual culture, folklore, history.

A case-study in categories: Vukonić

⁸⁵ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*

⁸⁶ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁸⁷ Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*

This interdisciplinarity and ‘in-betweenness’ of subjects like tourism and religion and, as a consequence, the field of studies that they co-constitute, brings with it a particular set of challenges. The very first book-length study on ‘tourism’ and ‘religion’ was written by a professor of Economics in 1996, Boris Vukonić, and it works as a useful illustration of both the benefits and challenges in the field. Vukonić oriented his study around a constructed figure: *Homo turisticus religiosus*. He defined this figure as ‘the religious tourist, i.e., believing tourist’ and the activities of this figure as ‘religious tourism’⁸⁸. Working with an understanding of religion as ‘a mutual relationship between the subject (the believer) and the object of religion’, Vukonić posits religious tourism as ‘the form of tourist movement which has arisen as a consequence of human religious motivation’ where ‘the goal of such a tourist movement is subservient to religious belief and human need.’⁸⁹ The key to his understanding of religious tourism is the concept of distinctness - a clear demarcation between tourists and religious tourists, tourism and religious tourism, tourist infrastructure and those that cater to religious tourists. Two illustrations of how Vukonić theorises this are below:

If we are to speak of human religious behaviour, it is essential that there should be an authentic religious act such as prayer, prostration, or cult. A religious act differs from, for example, an ethical act or an esthetic act [sic.] in that it is directed towards the divine, the sacred⁹⁰.

In a certain tourist-receiving destination, therefore, a rigorous distinction needs to be drawn between the tourist who is religious and the religious tourist (i.e. the tourist making a religiously motivated journey). This distinction corresponds to the general classification of believers into those who fulfil their religious duties and are convinced of their standpoint and those who do not fulfil

⁸⁸ Boris Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion* (Oxford: Elsevier, 1996), p. 69.

⁸⁹ Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion*, p. 71.

⁹⁰ Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion*, pp. 69-70.

their religious duties strictly or have certain reservations about religious principles⁹¹.

Working through these in turn, we can see how he first attempts to define the domain of the religious and second, the domain of religious tourism. His definition of the religious rests on the basis of religious acts, authenticity and through association with the sacred, and can be challenged in four different ways: first by **arguing that the ‘sacred’ has a wider reach than ‘religion’ and pre-dates it**⁹². In this understanding, religion cannot be set apart from, say, ethics, through recourse to the sacred, leaving us with too broad a definition. Alternatively, we can look to the work of Ninian Smart who urged that we see religion as having seven dimensions in a bid to expand the reach of the category: the practice and ritual dimension, the narrative and mythic dimension, the experiential and emotional dimension, the social and institutional dimension, the ethical and legal dimension, the doctrinal and philosophical dimension, the material dimension⁹³. **Vukonić’s suggestion can be** accommodated within this scheme - the acts he describes (prayer or prostrations for instance) can be seen to satisfy a ritual dimension for religion, but it runs the risk of defining religion too narrowly. Third, the distinction can be questioned by pointing to the *lack* of a (meaningful) difference between the religious and the ethical as separate academic categories⁹⁴ or, fourth, by indicating the dangers of

⁹¹ Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion*, P. 75

⁹² Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*, p. 47

⁹³ Ninian Smart, *The World’s Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Note: Smart originally conceived of religion as having six dimensions in *The Religious Experience of Mankind* (New York: Scribner, 1969). He added a seventh - a material dimension - in his 1989 publication.

⁹⁴ Timothy Fitzgerald, ‘A Critique of “Religion” as a Cross-Cultural Category’ in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 9:2 (1997), pp. 91-110.

relying on the subjective testimony of ‘authentic experience’ in the scholarly study of religion⁹⁵.

The second restricted category Vukonić offers is that of religious tourism. Here, he writes that even tourists who are religious may not fit his framework of ‘religious tourism’ unless their *primary* motivation is religious, and this motivation is clearly reflected through their actions-on-the-ground. In combination with his other criteria, this means that the *Homo turtisticus religiosus*, therefore, needs to be ‘believing’, perform efficacious acts, stay in places of religious tourism, and be motivated by an authentic search for the sacred. Here too, his binaries can be challenged.

By Vukonić’s own admission, the ‘religious tourist’ is broadly similar to the ‘pilgrim’⁹⁶. In this way, his understanding resonates with Erik Cohen’s understanding of the pilgrimage as a journey to a sacred centre while tourism is a movement towards an exotic periphery⁹⁷. However, Cohen’s emphasis on *modes* of tourism means that he does not see tourism and pilgrimage as binaries, and the particular modes he offers soften the distinction between the two. For instance, he likens the ‘existential’ tourist mode to a religious quest, but by positing the idea of an unfound centre (which the tourist seeks), presents subjects with much less certainty and much more possibility than Vukonić’s believers who, as he writes in the quoted excerpt, ‘fulfil their religious duties and are convinced of their standpoint.’ Marion

⁹⁵ Robert H. Sharf, ‘The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion’ in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7:11-12 (2002),

⁹⁶ Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion*, p. 76

⁹⁷ E. Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*, pp. 180-182.

Bowman's research on Glastonbury applies another of Cohen's modes to a field site: writing that the category of pilgrims who say they feel 'drawn' to Glastonbury, resembles Cohen's existential tourist: as seekers who have found their place⁹⁸. As a third complication, Graburn postulates tourism itself as sacred journey, with clear and distinct 'rites of passage'⁹⁹. Here again, we see that the categories of 'pilgrim', 'religious tourist' and 'tourist' interact in a way to subvert Vukonic's strict binaries.

Arguing from a different position, Stausberg noted that Vukonić's criterion that the religious tourist visit important religious places and buildings as part of their trip could just as easily be accommodated by, say, cultural heritage tourism¹⁰⁰. In fact, the interpretation of heritage **itself is an excellent rebuttal to Vukonic's exclusive** association of the sacred with the religious. Birgit Meyer and Marleen de Witte write that

Once brought into the framework of heritage, cultural forms are made to assume additional or even new value. The powerful effects of such framing become clear once it is realized that even ordinary everyday objects, coded as heritage, may be elevated to the level of the extraordinary and achieve a new sublime or sacred quality.¹⁰¹

By recognising that heritage can be 'sublime' or even 'sacred', and that the sacralisation of heritage can involve authenticating aesthetic practices, they loosen **the stronghold over the sacred that Vukonić accords to religious tourism.** MacCannell would agree. He describes the process of creating tourist attractions as

⁹⁸ Marion Bowman, 'Drawn to Glastonbury' in I. Reader and T. Walter (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), p. 57.

⁹⁹ Graburn, 'Tourism: The Sacred Journey'. The term 'rites of passage' is from Arnold Van Gennep whose work Graburn uses. Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960)

¹⁰⁰ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 75.

¹⁰¹ Birgit Meyer and Marleen De Witte, 'Heritage and the Sacred: Introduction' in *Material Religion* 9:3 (2013), p. 276

‘sight sacralisation’ involving stages of, among other things, framing, elevation and enshrinement¹⁰². In this way MacCannell reframes the authentic as the sacred, considers a search for the sacred outside of the context of religion, and builds a conception of tourism as a secular pilgrimage.

As with Vukonić’s attempt to mark the boundaries of religion, his separation of ‘tourism’ from ‘the tourism of the religious person’ to ‘religious tourism’ is often unclear and unconvincing. This is not to say that his theory as a whole is not useful: he demonstrates the importance of tourism to economic development and challenges the idea of the tourist as a rapacious and irresponsible consumer. We can see this view in the debates over tourism offered in the previous section and in criticisms that it results in the overcrowding of place¹⁰³, in the exploitation of the environment and of human resources¹⁰⁴ and in the depreciation of the ‘sacred’ quality of religious destinations¹⁰⁵. In a strange parallel to the way in which MacCannell’s association of the tourist with authenticity authenticates tourism as a respectable form, Vukonić’s association of the tourist with the religious can be seen as a dignifying project. By employing a dialectical process in which other identities and ways of engagement are excluded, Vukonić leaves us with a distinct subject

¹⁰² MacCannell, *The Tourist*, p. 41-48

¹⁰³ Jason M Fish and Mary Fish, ‘International Tourism and Pilgrimage: a discussion’ in *Global Economic Review* 22: 2 (1993): 83-90.; Erik Cohen, ‘Tourism and Religion: A Comparative Perspective’ in *Pacific Tourism Review* 2:1 (1998).

¹⁰⁴ Gupta, Vasanti, ‘Sustainable Tourism: learning from Indian religious traditions’ in *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 11: 2/3 (1999), 91-95; Isaree Baedcharoen, ‘Impacts of Religious Tourism in Thailand’ (Doctoral Dissertation), 2000 Gupta (1999); Madan (1986); Baedcharoen (2000)

¹⁰⁵ Joseph J Hobbs, ‘Sacred Space and Touristic Development At Jebel Musa (Mt Sinai), Egypt’ in *Journal of Cultural Geography* 12:2 (1992): 99-113.; Jagdish Kaur, *Himalayan Pilgrimages and the New Tourism* (Mumbai: Himalayan Books, 1985); Myra Shackley, ‘Managing the Cultural Impacts of Religious Tourism in the Himalayas, Tibet and Nepal’ in *Tourism and Cultural Conflicts* (1999), 95-112.

who is defined through difference. At points, his criteria can be challenged for being too restrictive and constituting a category that is too static; on the other hand, if his **'religious tourist' is a 'pilgrim'**, then why do we need the category at all? For fields of study founded on difference - **'religion' and 'tourism'** - both the ossifying and the dissolution of difference can be destabilising.

* * * *

Categories in the study of religion

This is a problem that has dogged the study of religion, too. Consider, for instance, **various theorisations of the boundaries between 'the religious', 'the spiritual', 'the sacred' and so on.** This discussion has taken various forms: from the search for definitions, to an enquiry into the nature and contents of each term, to a study of the worlds that they can be used to build. 'Religion', for example, has been theorised by the functions it performs (Durkheim sees it as social cement, for example¹⁰⁶), by its substantive features (the belief in spiritual beings, as E.B. Tylor proposes¹⁰⁷), and the dimensions it creates (Paul Tillich's formulation of 'ultimate concern'¹⁰⁸). The concept has been rigorously scrutinised for its discursive ideological effects (Talal Asad¹⁰⁹), reframed by the use of new metaphors and vocabularies (Thomas Tweed¹¹⁰) and rejected outright (Timothy Fitzgerald¹¹¹). Likewise, 'the spiritual' has been approached in several different ways: by studying its concerns (an emphasis on subjectivity and self-determination, as theorised by Carrette and King¹¹²), its

¹⁰⁶ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*.

¹⁰⁷ Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive culture* (New York: Harper, 1958 [1870])

¹⁰⁸ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of faith* (New York: Perennial, 2001 [1957])

¹⁰⁹ Talal Asad, *Genealogies Of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993)

¹¹⁰ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*

¹¹¹ Fitzgerald, **'A Critique of Religion'**

¹¹² Jeremy R. Carrette and Richard King, *Selling spirituality: the silent takeover of religion*. (London: Routledge, 2005).

ontological conditions (Flanagan and Jupp's understanding of spirituality as a way of 'fulfilling the cultural needs of the moment'¹¹³) and its effects (identified by Heelas and Woodhead to be 'the cultivation or the sacralization of unique subjective-lives'¹¹⁴).

An important theme in this discussion on spirituality is the evidence that in particular use-**contexts, 'the spiritual' is typically clarified and/or expanded** through the co-presentation of 'the religious'. The juxtaposition of the categories, which Sutcliffe and Bowman have noted as a common academic practice¹¹⁵, is one such method: theorising 'spirituality' as means of differentiation from 'organised religion'¹¹⁶ for example. The exploration of their interconnection is another method: Voas and Bruce understand spirituality as 'clearly religious (in a broad sense) to the extent that it involves non-natural forces'¹¹⁷, while Sutcliffe and Bowman see it as an 'emic repackaging of popular and vernacular religion'¹¹⁸. **Likewise, the 'sacred'** has been variously theorised as an essential part of the religious¹¹⁹, as separate from

¹¹³ K. Flanagan and P.C. Jupp, 'Introduction' in K. Flanagan and P.C. Jupp (eds.) *A Sociology of Spirituality* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), p. 5.

¹¹⁴ P. Heelas and L. Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p.6.

¹¹⁵ S. Sutcliffe and M. Bowman, 'Introduction' in S. Sutcliffe and M. Bowman (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 10

¹¹⁶ P. Heelas, 'The Spiritual Revolution: From Religion to Spirituality' in L. Woodhead, P. Fletcher, H. Kawanami and D. Smith (eds.), *Religions in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 357-377.

¹¹⁷ D. Voas and S. Bruce, 'The Spiritual Revolution: Another False Dawn for the Sacred' in Flanagan, A *Sociology of Spirituality*, p. 44.

¹¹⁸ **Sutcliffe and Bowman, 'Introduction' in *Beyond New Age*, p. 8**

¹¹⁹ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*

the religious¹²⁰, as an essential part of the spiritual¹²¹, as having little to do with the spiritual¹²², and as being too obscure altogether¹²³.

I am using the above disagreements over the precise nature of the ‘sacred’, ‘religious’, ‘spiritual’ and so on as illustrations of the fact that the co-construction of identities and concepts instructive to the concept of tourist (traveller, not tourist; tourist, not tripper; explorer, not traveller and so on) applies to the study of religion, too. We can see this in the co-presentation of the spiritual with the religious above but more widely in the co-presentation of the sacred with the profane, the pilgrimage with the tour. In their long search for clarity of definitions, scholars in the study of religion have been *tolerant* towards lexical messiness while aiming to strike a balance between dynamism, rigour and applicability in the formulation of constituent terms.

We can take, for instance, the case of pilgrimage. Michael Stausberg notes that, **were we to follow the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s criteria for** tourism mentioned previously (**outside the ‘usual environment, a duration greater** than one night and less than a year, non-remunerative), pilgrimage would be considered part of tourism¹²⁴. However, in a later discussion of the two, he notes **that ‘in the Western discursive universe, which is** heavily imbued by Christian

¹²⁰ V. Anttonen, ‘Sacred’ in J.R. Hinnells (ed), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 272

¹²¹ Heelas and Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, pp. 5-6

¹²² Voas and Bruce, ‘The Spiritual Revolution’, p. 44.

¹²³ Willi Braun, ‘Religion’ in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide To The Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 10.

¹²⁴ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 6.

patterns that are still casting long shadows over scholarly discussions, pilgrimage **and tourism occupy two diametrically opposite semantic poles.**¹²⁵ He offers some of these binaries as examples in the table reproduced below¹²⁶:

Tourism	Pilgrimage
Secular Pleasure Curiosity Commercial Evil Material End in itself Holiday Presence Modern Confirming Relaxing Distraction Directed towards Periphery	Religious Faith Duty Ascetic Good Spiritual Progression Ritual History/Myth/Future Salvation Pre- or anti- modern Transformative Meritorious Intensification Directed towards Centre

We can see signs of these binaries in broad discussions on tourism and pilgrimage: **in the separation of the religious tourist's sense of duty, faith, meritorious conduct, from the tourist's pleasure-seeking, voluntary tourism**¹²⁷; in the observation that tourism moves towards the periphery and the pilgrimage towards the centre¹²⁸, in the reasoning that within pilgrimage, the journey - corporeal and physical - is as important as the destination¹²⁹, in the assumption that the administration of a Cathedral as a place of tourism is a strike against it as a place of religion¹³⁰.

¹²⁵ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 19

¹²⁶ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 20

¹²⁷ Vukonić, *Tourism and Religion*, pp. 69-75.

¹²⁸ Cohen, *Contemporary Tourism*, pp. 180-182

¹²⁹ Alex Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*,

¹³⁰ Jane Hubert, 'Sacred Beliefs and Beliefs of Sacredness' in D. L. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves, A. Schanche (Eds.) *Sacred sites, sacred places* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 14.

Moreover, as with the relational understanding of the tourist which, we have seen, was not restricted to the academic sphere, the assumed binary of pilgrim and tourist can be seen elsewhere, too. Consider this report of Samuel Johnson's visit to - coincidentally - Iona in 1773:

When we think of the distance he travelled, both by land and sea, and of the dangers to which the absence of modes of conveyance, or their insufficiency, exposed him - we must be permitted to say, that the pilgrimage of Dr. [Samuel] Johnson cannot be classed among offerings which cost nothing. Now the journey is easy, the facilities are great.¹³¹

We will come back to the above excerpt in Chapter Eight; for now, we can consider **how it associates pilgrimage with risk, effort and difficulty. In Stausberg's scheme,** we can relate this to the distinctions between the assumed ease of other kinds of travel, and the meritorious and taxing nature of pilgrimage and the implied asceticism and strength of motivation. And yet, this same extract shows the validity **of Stausberg's note that the ways in which the co-construction of tourism and pilgrimage has taken place has often revealed a Christian theological understanding.** In this light, we can consider the background of the writer of the extract above - as a one-time Bishop of Argyll and the Isles - suggesting that the presentation of Johnson's touring was also a presentation of a particular model of Christianity. We can consider the fact that Vukonić's chapter on the *homo touristicus religious* opens with three Biblical quotations on hospitality¹³² and Stausberg himself has noted the Catholic orientation of Vukonić's theoretical research¹³³. We can note Hubert's questioning of the viability of Canterbury Cathedral as a place of both religion and

¹³¹ Right Rev. Alexander Ewing, D.C.L., *The Cathedral or Abbey Church of Iona and the Early Celtic Church and Mission of St. Columba* (Edinburgh: R Grant and Son, 1880) p. 64

¹³² 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Matthew 25:35); 'Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another' (Peter 4:9); 'Like a bird that strays from its nest, is a man who strays from his home (Proverbs 27:8).

¹³³ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism* p. 9.

tourism alongside her over-certain and nostalgic observation that the idea of sacredness holds less purchase in Britain than it did in the past¹³⁴.

All of this works to show that the ‘tourist’ is not a *secular* category. The discussion on traveller types in the previous section showed, for instance, the dense nexus of social, cultural and economic relations **within which the formulation of the ‘tourist’ was made.** We can revisit E. P. Thompson’s observation that the suspicion towards the tourist was partly a function of the wider suspicion of Methodism towards leisure (and its association with frivolity), clarifying the confluence between the religious and cultural currents of the time. In a similar vein we can note that Thomas Cook - **whose provision of the ‘package tour’ in the mid-18th century has been credited with revolutionising the industry of tourism - was himself a former Baptist preacher and a key figure of the Victorian temperance movement.** Dann notes that Cook’s Mass Tourism packages ‘exercised control over protégés via a system of coupons and moral injunctions about excesses of flesh,’¹³⁵ and Schwartz comments that Cook ‘wanted to take workers away from the stresses of an urban industrial society that he felt fed their penchant for vice and violence’¹³⁶, showing the signs of a civilising - even soteriological - mission. The tourist has always been implicated in religious frameworks - by her construction through motivation (a seeker), the frequent valorisation of authenticity, and the fluid and fuzzy boundaries of *both* the religious and the touristic. How, then, can the tourist be studied at all?

¹³⁴ Hubert, ‘Sacred Beliefs’, p. 12.

¹³⁵ Dann, *Language of Tourism*, p. 72

¹³⁶ Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. xvii

The value of empirical study

In this instance, work such as that of Alex Norman on spiritual tourism can provide an excellent guide to navigating categories. Norman defines the spiritual tourist as **one who ‘undertakes a spiritual practice or seeks spiritual progression in the course of their travels, usually with the intention of gaining ‘spiritual benefit’¹³⁷** and builds his work using multi-sited ethnography¹³⁸ across two sites: Rishikesh, India (coincidentally an hour away from and closely linked to Haridwar - where the description of the Kumbh Mela in the opening of the thesis was set) and the Camino de Santiago- the network of routes across Europe that come together at the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Working from the qualitative data obtained at these two sites through interviews and observations with western tourists, he portrays a subject motivated by the project of self-betterment, rebelling against consumer cultures in the west, seeking simplicity, and adopting **‘work-like organisation of time’¹³⁹** (in Rishikesh) and engaging the body both physically and emotionally (in the Camino)¹⁴⁰. In her critical distance from Western values, and practice of a (comparatively) more severe and demanding work-like **tourism, Norman’s spiritual tourist challenges** binaries between pilgrim and tourist: showing that trial is not the preserve of the pilgrim, and that tourism is not the pursuit of play. By foregrounding fieldwork observations, recognising subjectivity, and describing the dense realities of the places in which his study is located, Norman is able to generate understandings that are particular (that the spiritual tourist from

¹³⁷ A. Norman, *Spiritual Tourism: Travel and Religious Practice in Western Society* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 17.

¹³⁸ George E. Marcus, **‘Multi-Sited Ethnography’** in S. Coleman and P. von Hellerman (eds.), *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities in the Translocation of Research Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2011 [1995])

¹³⁹ Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁰ Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*, p. 60.

the West on a yoga retreat in India embraces a deliberate practise of simplicity as a critique of consumer culture and Western values¹⁴¹) and general (the exertions of the body are part of the experience of pilgrimage¹⁴²). In recognising the spatial-cultural nexus within which his respondents operate and the complexities of the place in which his study is located, he produces a category that is built from **‘ground-up’: presenting internal consistencies without reifying either the place or the tourist herself.**

Thomas Tweed, setting out his theory of religion, posits that ‘religion’ outside of specific applications and cases does not exist: ‘interpreters-even armchair theorists-never encounter religion-in-general. There are only situated observers encountering particular practices performed by particular people in particular contexts.’¹⁴³ This is a softer line of argument, then, to Jonathan Z. Smith’s **assertion that there is no automatic and pre-existing ‘data’ for ‘religion’; it is a scholar’s category that ‘has no existence apart from the academy.’**¹⁴⁴ Consider, however, the shared implication for both of these claims: first, from Jonathan Z. Smith, who offers an understanding of religion not as an ontological reality but as a constructed, scholarly category and second, from Tweed who clarifies more precisely that the **‘religion’ that even scholars study are not encountered in-general but always in specific contexts: in particular places at particular times.**

¹⁴¹ Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*, p. 62

¹⁴² Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*, p. 51

¹⁴³ Tweed, *Crossing*, p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: from Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), p. xi

This, then, is the benefit of empirical studies in a field that has been largely driven by questions about conceptual boundaries. A superb volume called *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture* is dedicated to expanding the study of pilgrimage outside of **‘organised and official religious centres’¹⁴⁵: to Graceland as a ‘shrine’ for ‘devotion’** towards Elvis Presley¹⁴⁶ or Anfield stadium in Liverpool after the Hillsborough Disaster¹⁴⁷ in 1989¹⁴⁸. In the volume, Allcock argues that the revival of interest in **Kosovo legends and the pilgrimage to Kosovo challenges the binary of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ by entering a ‘cultural liminal zone which is neither, and yet both, high culture and popular culture, religion and politics.’¹⁴⁹** Walter uses Victor Turner’s influential idea of *communitas* (as the egalitarian bonding between pilgrims within the transient and liminal state of pilgrimage) and shows how the case of war grave pilgrimages produces a particular nostalgic recollection of *communitas* for the structured social relations of war-time¹⁵⁰. In a strikingly similar position to those tourism scholars who argue for the disentanglement of contemporary tourism from the **‘Mass Tourism’ model, Reader calls for the untethering of contemporary pilgrimage from the iconic conceptions of medieval pilgrimage in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. He writes that ‘pilgrimage is too important and rich a subject to be limited and confined to the explicitly religious domain.’¹⁵¹**

¹⁴⁵ Reader, *Pilgrimage*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁶ Christine King, ‘His Truth Goes Marching On: Elvis Presley and the Pilgrimage to Graceland’ in Reader, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 92-107

¹⁴⁷ ‘1989: Football fans crushed at Hillsborough’:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/april/15/newsid_2491000/2491195.stm [27.02]

¹⁴⁸ Grace Davie, ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone: The Anfield Pilgrimage’ in Reader, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 201-220

¹⁴⁹ John B. Allcock, ‘Kosovo: The Heavenly and the Earthly Crown’ in Reader, *Pilgrimage*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁰ Walter, ‘War Grave Pilgrimage’, p. 80.

¹⁵¹ Reader, *Pilgrimage*, p. 16.

This leaves us at a curious juncture: on the one hand, we have writing on travel that argues that tourism be seen as a more dignified pursuit, and arguing for this dignity by recourse to discourses of authenticity, meaning-making and connection, and the trope of the quest. On the other hand, we have calls to extend the reach of pilgrimage, and to diffuse the ready associations between pilgrimage and religion, pilgrimage and hardship, pilgrimage and the interior, introspective journey. Further, in the way that particular kinds of tourist have been used by theorists as surrogates with which to explore wider social-cultural constructions we can see how, in the particular area of religion and tourism, the separation of the pilgrim from the tourist functions as a surrogate for the separation of religion from other domains such as the secular. Caught in the middle of this discussion: what is a scholar of religion and tourism to do?

This is the ground in which the conceptual and theoretical shifts in this thesis must be located. First, in its movement to one of the key terms in the title of this work: from tourist to visitor. Here, visitor serves an expedient and pragmatic function: helping to bring together the vast range of different tourist types and identities (pilgrims, travellers, tourists, backpackers, holidaymakers) under one umbrella. However, given earlier discussions in this chapter, any notion that terms like the pilgrim and the tourist do not carry their own rhetorical weight can be roundly dismissed. Both terms have been seen to be moral categories, both have been identified as being in need of updating, and we see the attempt to expand the understanding of the tourist through an acknowledgement of the diversity of tourist experience alongside calls to extend the reach of pilgrimage, and to diffuse the **ready associations between pilgrimage and religion. In this vein, the term ‘visitor’** avoids these fractious debates about identity (though, as this work will show, it has

its own limitations) and allows for the expanded understanding of *both* the tourist and the pilgrim by placing them in a shared analytical framework.

Chapter four, we will see, makes a strikingly similar call for the shift to specialness. It shows how studying the special allows us to study, variously, religion, spirituality, magic, Romance, heritage: and to bring them into a shared and more equitable **analytical framework. In this way, both this thesis' lexical shifts enable it to strike** a balance between generality and specificity: producing a broad framework of specialness that can be applied in other sites by studying the imaginative, corporeal, discursive labours of the visitor within a highly situated spatial-temporal context. As this thesis will show, this place-specific focus will allow to study three parallel processes in places of contemporary tourism: the role of consumption and production; the interaction between the material and metaphorical; the interaction between work and leisure.

3. 'Placing' this thesis II: Fieldwork Context



Figure 3.1 | The Ferry from Mull to Iona

Iona is an island in the inner Hebrides, off the west coast of Scotland. It is removed not once but twice from mainland Scotland - by the larger island of Mull, to the east. From mainland Scotland, you might commonly reach it through Oban in Argyll and Bute (a three and a half hour train journey from Glasgow). A thriving, bustling **town, Oban's relative wealth and industry have been related to a large part to** tourism, owing to the fact that it was a convenient point of departure to several Hebridean islands¹⁵²: Barra, Coll, Tiree, South Uist, Lismore, Colonsay. You might take the large ferry operated by Caledonian MacBrayne to Craignure on the south-east corner of Mull. After the forty-five minute ferry journey is another ninety-minute journey, this time on a narrow, single-track road with regular passing places

¹⁵² Neal Ascherson, 'Preface' in D. Omand (Ed.) *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd, 2004).p.xi

that runs through to Fionnphort, on the south west. Iona lies across from Fionnphort, separated by a narrow stretch of water known as the Sound of Iona.

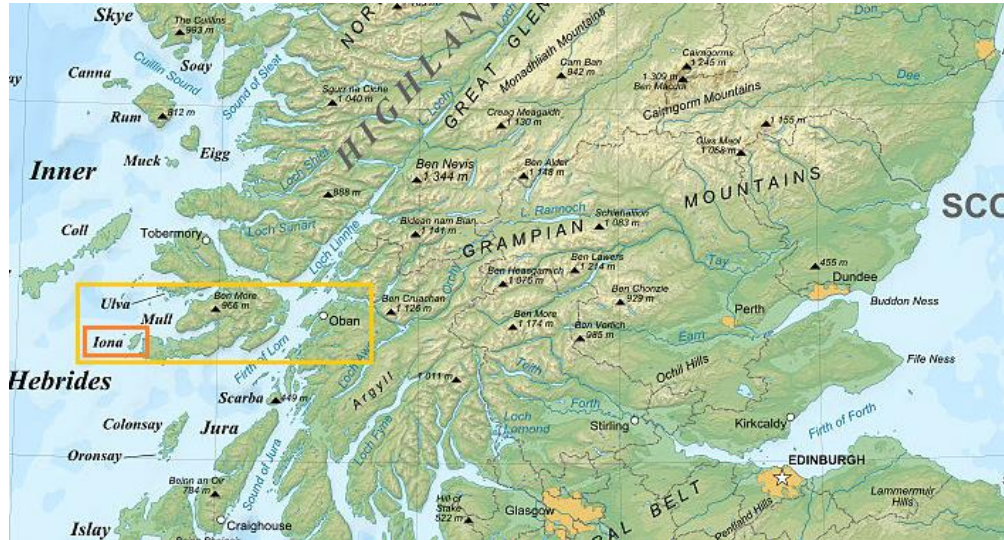


Figure 3.2 | Iona in relation to Scotland

The island is part of a larger cluster of islands in the Argyll and Bute region of Scotland known as the inner Hebrides. To its north, is the island of Staffa - famous for its basalt columns and the Treshnish isles - known for being a favoured nesting point of seabirds. Further away are Muck, Rum, Canna, and Eigg - which are known as the ‘small isles’. Further still is the popular island of Skye. To the west of Iona are the islands of Coll and Tiree and then the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean (‘nothing between here and America’, one of the leaders of the Iona Community’s Wednesday pilgrimage had said, looking towards the ocean from a high point on the island).

In the south are the islands of Islay and Jura. Lying to Iona's south east is the island of Erraid - home now to a retreat house run by the Findhorn Foundation, and more prominently associated with the novel *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson, whose father helped to build one of the lighthouses on the island (there is a beach on the island - **Balfour's Bay** - that takes its name from the hero of that novel, David Balfour). Further up the east coast, between Iona and Mull are two smaller islands: **Eilean nam ban**, called the 'island of woman' (the story goes that this is the island to which Saint Columba, who had his monastery on Iona, exiled women, on the grounds that their presence on Iona would be a source of mischief) and Eilean Jura - 'storm island', enticingly separated from a northern beach on Iona by a narrow strip of blue-green water, and unsuspectingly vicious rip tides. These are Iona's neighbours, but what of the island itself?

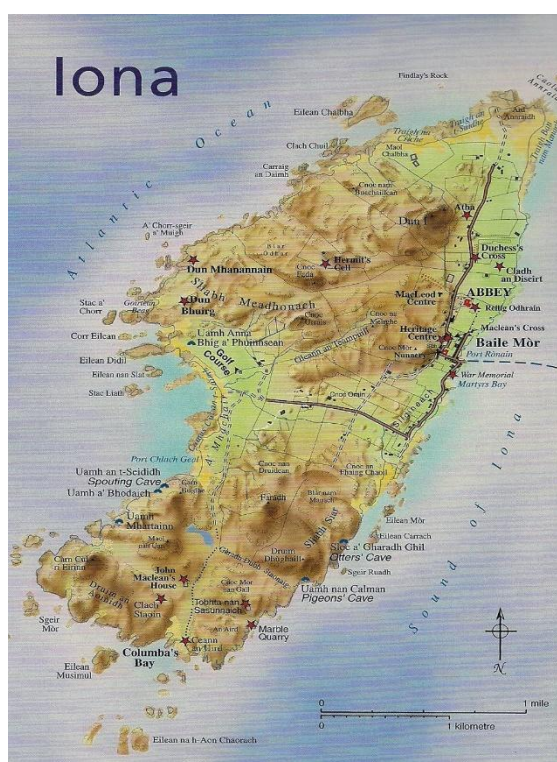


Figure 3.3 | Map of Iona

In a paeon to the island, F. Marian McNeill writes that while several of the western isles of Scotland are known to be places of beauty and myth, **'it is one of the smallest that has achieved the widest and most splendid fame of all'**¹⁵³. The book this is drawn from is itself a compilation of often reverential declarations about the island. In her introduction, she asks, rhetorically, **'how is it... that successive adorations come to be consecrated on the low, bare island of Iona, which from the dawn of history seems to wear a misty halo?'**¹⁵⁴. More such tributes and notes follow:

A few places in the world are to be held holy, because of love which consecrates them, and the faith which enshrines them. Their names are themselves talismans of spiritual beauty. Of these is Iona.¹⁵⁵

The beginning of Iona is almost part of the beginning of the earth itself.¹⁵⁶

We were now treading that illustrious island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarian derives the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of **religion... That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona.**¹⁵⁷

These impressions are, naturally, subject to heavy curation, in that the anthology at large functions as a dedication to the island itself, but the nature of the language used to describe the island should be indicative of how it stands in relation to the other islands mentioned previously. The superlative tones, the ready association with religion and piety, and the singularity of the island: these are often the points of emphasis. An internet search of 'Iona' across several categories yields the

¹⁵³ F. Marian McNeill, *An Iona Anthology* (Edinburgh: The Albyn Press, 1947), p. 5.

¹⁵⁴ McNeill, *Iona Anthology*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Fiona MacLeod, 'Approach to Iona' in McNeill, *Iona Anthology*, p. 14.

¹⁵⁶ E.C. Trenholme, 'The story of Iona,' in McNeill, *Iona Anthology*, p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ James Boswell, 'Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson' [note: the words spoken are those of Johnson, quoted by Boswell], in McNeill, *Iona Anthology*, pp. 81-82. This will be taken up in more detail in Chapter Five.

following results: 'Iona is a holy isle, an enduring symbol of Christianity in Scotland'¹⁵⁸, 'Iona is a sacred and unspoilt island'¹⁵⁹, 'Iona is a place of natural beauty and serenity with white sandy beaches and views to stay with you forever'¹⁶⁰. By **these accounts, "Iona is" many things at once: historical, beautiful, significant.** Referring to the reputation of the English town of Glastonbury, Bowman terms it a **'multivocal, multivalent site'**¹⁶¹ where a 'convergence of history, topography, legend and popular belief maintains Glastonbury's status as a compelling destination.'¹⁶² Iona, we can see, exhibits a similar multivalence in the different layers of meaning that surround it. It represents a convergence of the religious with the historic; the pastoral with the modern; spiritual with the scenic.

Iona's reputation

Iona has been hailed 'the symbolic centre of Scottish Christianity'¹⁶³, largely owing to its connection with Saint Columba who arrived on Iona from Ireland in 563 AD with twelve monks and founded a monastery that, among others things, established Iona's reputation as a place of learning, cultural production and worship. Several Christian denominations have a strong presence on the island: the ecumenical Iona **Community, the Episcopal Bishop's House, the Parish Church that represents the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Catholic House of Prayer** - many more still

¹⁵⁸ Historic Scotland website: http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/propertyplan/propertyabout.htm?PropID=pl_160&PropName=Iona%20Abbey [Last access: 21.10.2017]

¹⁵⁹ Findhorn Foundation website: <http://www.findhorn.org/programmes/230/> [Last access: 21.10.2017]

¹⁶⁰ Caledonian MacBrayne Ferries website: <http://www.calmac.co.uk/destinations/iona.htm> [Last access: 21.10.2017]

¹⁶¹ Bowman, *Drawn to Glastonbury*, p. 55

¹⁶² Bowman, *Drawn to Glastonbury*, p. 30.

¹⁶³ BBC Website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/history/articles/iona/> [Last access: 21.10.2017]

arrange for retreats and pilgrimages to the island. A second aspect of its fame is its **scenery and ecology, billed as a place with 'interesting walks and rare wildlife... [and an] exceptional quality of light and clarity of air.'**¹⁶⁴ Ornithologists abound, on the search for rare birds, particularly the endangered corncrake while geologists come to Iona to see and study its Lewisian Gneiss rocks which, at 2,000 million years, are **Britain's oldest rocks. Thirdly, several publications and pamphlets have** explored Iona as a historic site, and have dedicated themselves to listing and interpreting significant buildings and built heritage on the island, from its eighth century High Crosses with their typically Celtic designs and the thirteenth century Augustinian Nunnery, to the graveyard of the Iona Abbey where several Scottish Kings are buried¹⁶⁵.

Then there is the rather enigmatic aspect of Iona's fame: its 'atmosphere'. George MacLeod, who in 1938 founded the Iona Community¹⁶⁶, famously wrote of it as a 'thin place', with only 'a tissue paper separating heaven and earth'¹⁶⁷: a place filled with the promise of encounters with the divine. Echoing these possibilities, a travel website for Scotland calls Iona 'an enchanting, magical, and very special place'¹⁶⁸. It has been associated with Druidry and has been seen as an important centre for Celticity. It has a long history of being seen as a place of healing and has been

¹⁶⁴ National Trust website: <http://www.nts.org.uk/Property/Iona/> [Last access: 21.10.2017]

¹⁶⁵ John G. Dunbar and Ian Fisher, *Iona: a guide to the monuments* (for the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, [?]; Rev. W.L. Alexander, *Iona : its history, ecclesiastical and monumental remains* (Oban: D. Mackay, 1990); Rev. A. MacMillan, *Iona: its history, antiquities, etc* (London: Houlster and Sons, 1898).

¹⁶⁶ The Iona Community was founded in Govan, Glasgow.

¹⁶⁷ Ron Ferguson, *George MacLeod: founder of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001(1990)), p. 156.

¹⁶⁸ Undiscovered Scotland website: <http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/iona/iona/> [Last access: 21.10.2016]

associated with a broad range of New Age discourses including leyline discourse and energy discourse¹⁶⁹. The Findhorn Community - an eco-spiritual community with its roots in Forres in North-east Scotland, also offers retreats and exchanges to Iona which it describes as **‘a place uniquely poised to heighten your senses’**.¹⁷⁰ The Community maintains a house on the island - here referred to as Cois Na Farraige - that was gifted to the Foundation in which these retreats and events such as weekly meditation sessions are hosted.

Visitorship to Iona

Iona’s richly layered reputation has attracted a consistent and robust record of visitors. Iona’s contemporary visitor numbers are staggering, considering the size of the island and the (relative) difficulty of reaching it from main centres of **population. The current website for island’s Community Council reports that Iona** receives 130,000 visitors a year¹⁷¹. Several of these visitors come as part of tour itineraries offered by tour bus companies during the summer season¹⁷²; a smaller number disembark from cruise ships that visit the island in May and June, but which are becoming increasingly more frequent in the rest of the season as well. **There are other kinds of ‘day tripper’ visitors too: who make trips from nearby places such** as Oban or Mull, staying for a few hours. Alongside visitors who stay on the island

¹⁶⁹ Graham W. Monteith. ‘Iona and Healing: A Discourse Analysis’ in *Beyond New Age* (2000): 105-117

¹⁷⁰ Findhorn Foundation website: <http://www.findhorn.org/aboutus/#.VEh0VvnF9> [Last Access: 11.11.2016]

¹⁷¹ Isle of Iona website: <http://www.welcometoiona.com/> [Last Access: 21.10.2017] While **this is not an official figure, we can compare it to the stated numbers in ‘Tourism in Scotland’s Regions 2013’ published by Visit Scotland in 2014: Edinburgh Castle: 1,420,027; Skara Brae: 74,471 Loch Lomond and Balloch: 1,140,119. (p. 6).**

¹⁷² **Rabbie’s Tours, Highland Tours, Three Island Tour, West Coast Tours, Majestic Line, Hebridean Princess, Linblad Expeditions and Silversea Expeditions.**

for a few hours in the day, there are those who stay overnight - some for one or two nights, some on week-long family holidays or retreat weeks; a few visitors stay longer still, for three weeks or a month at a stretch. There is a continuity in this process, in that Iona has had a long history of visitorship. It was an important place of pilgrimage at the time of Columba until the eighth and early ninth centuries, when the island suffered a spate of Viking attacks. Margaret and John Gold relate the search for the 'Ossian poet' and the 'Celtic revival' as a decisive factor in the making of tourism to the Highlands and Islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: a reflection of the increased importance and cultural weight given to travel in general in this period. They argue that the appeal of Iona must be looked at within the context of Highland Romanticism¹⁷³, which has been traced to the seventeenth century, but had an especial impetus after the Battle of Culloden in 1740.

The introduction of the steamer ship to Iona, and its appearance in guidebooks and travelogues in the 1820s, cemented its popularity¹⁷⁴. In 1890s, an islander - Alex Ritchie - was employed by the eighth Duke of Argyll to be an official tour guide, a position confirmed later with a pay of twenty five pounds a year. The Ritchie **family's cottage** - Shuna - welcomed **musicians and artists, crafting Iona's** reputation as a place of artistic production¹⁷⁵. A boat slip was constructed on the island between 1908-1912 that made it possible for the island to receive more traffic, and for the Abbey to have visitors and worshippers. Mairi MacArthur

¹⁷³ J.R. Gold and M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995) p. 57.

¹⁷⁴ E. M. MacArthur, *Iona: The Living Memory of a Crofting Community 1750-1914* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 6

¹⁷⁵ MacArthur, *Iona*, p. 121.

identifies a particular flurry of tourists visiting the island between 1924 and 1928, in the interwar period when there was an uptick in tourism in general. The founding of the Iona Community by MacLeod in 1938 resulted in a second flurry of visitors to the island: people who had connections with the Community or who volunteered for **the rebuilding of the Abbey. In the present day, many of Iona's visitors can trace an 'ancestry' of visitorship, in a manner of speaking, to relatives who first came to the island in the 1930s, or earlier.** This category of visitor - **the 'regular'** - will recur **at different points in this thesis, with the implications of this 'regularity' teased out** as well.

* * * *

On fieldwork: practice, method, respondents

I arrived on Iona for a pilot study in April 2015 to scope out my fieldwork. On my first brief visit to the island in 2014 - when I was in the process of finalising the site for my fieldwork - I had stayed in the Abbey with the Iona Community. When I returned for the pilot project, I recognised two of the staff members from that year. But aside from these vaguely familiar faces, I knew no one else on the island. The National Trust, who are the primary landowners on Iona, were aware of the project, as were Historic Environment Scotland, the Island Community Council and the Iona Community. In advance of getting to the island, I had noted down the public e-mail addresses on the Iona community Council website (which listed businesses, accommodation options and so on), and written to as many people on the island as I could. The e-mail was simple: I introduced myself as a researcher who would be on the island for a few months, introduced the research, and asked if they might have some time to speak with me about their own thoughts about the island. Most

did not reply, but with the few who did, I set up meetings and interviews. The e-mails, if anything, were my attempt at transparency: making my own presence, and my intentions on the island, known.

The pilot trip consisted of more such exercises. I visited every shop on the island in turn, introduced myself and my project, and said that I would be back shortly to stay for a longer time to conduct fieldwork. Many of the people I spoke with seemed interested in if not tolerant of the project, and were very generous with their time. Such drop-ins and, later, my attendance at a public meeting of Iona's Community Council **became valuable ways in which I 'declared' myself to Iona's islanders.** With visitors to the island, **I had a similarly 'cold' beginning. My first interviewees were** people with whom I had had conversations in person. I knew, however, that this tactic of finding respondents would be insufficient, given the length and scope of my research project. For one, it relied too heavily on my own presence - in initiating conversation and indirectly selecting interviewees. For this reason, I put up small notices about my work around the island.



I am a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, looking at visitors to Iona and the relationships they form with the island. By considering simple things – where visitors go, what they photograph, their stories about this place – I hope to understand more about the everyday life of the island as a visitor spot.

I'll be on Iona all summer, hoping to speak with as many people as possible. If you can spare some time for a grateful researcher, please do get in touch. I'd love to hear what you have to say!

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Figure 3.4 | The Research Note

The images above are the notice in full and photographs of the research note on display in the ferry that takes visitors from Fionnphort to Iona and on the notice board inside the Iona Community shop. The notes were up elsewhere, too: on the main notice board by the jetty, the public board outside the craft shop, the boards inside various establishments on Iona: the hostel, the hotels, the campsite, the café, the Catholic House of Prayer, Bishop's House, the Iona Community Refectory, the Findhorn Retreat house. The notes proved to be effective. **'I saw your poster on the board, your project sounds interesting'**, someone seated at a neighbouring table in the pub told me one evening, before bringing his chair over to join me at my table for a conversation. **'We saw your note on the board and then we saw it again in the campsite and thought, oh it's a sign, we should totally do this'**, a couple told me; another said, **'Your write-up was in the folder for our B&B and I told my mother**

that she'd be perfect for it'. There was also this text message: 'Hi! I saw that you're looking for people to interview and I'm bored.'

Word-of-mouth also proved to be crucial. The warden of one retreat house on the island kindly announced my project over dinner, leading to some people in the visiting group asking to speak with me; some islanders mentioned my name to friends of theirs who were visiting. Visitors spoke with other visitors, too: one of my respondents passed on my name to her cousin, visiting later in the season. Two months later, when I met her cousin for an interview, she had brought along with her a much-folded piece of paper: my research note with my contact details **underlined and a sentence saying 'I met Krittika re her research and wondered if you would be interested in speaking to her too?'**

* * * *

The respondents

76 visitors took part in this thesis as interviewees and, of this number, 26 form part of its core method of data collection: the hour-long walking interview (described in a later section). A list of all the interviewees for this project can be found in Appendix I. In addition, I conducted 13 supplementary interviews: with island residents and seasonal staff¹⁷⁶.

¹⁷⁶ As I explain in the appendix, no list of these supplementary interviews has been provided in order to protect the privacy of the residents and staff who participated in the project.

The methods I used to solicit respondents were addressed in a previous section. A majority of the respondents volunteered to participate. However, I made a note of the broad demographic that was forming and, halfway through the project, identified any groups that were under-represented in the sample and took steps to correct the balance, in the second half of my fieldwork. This was most often the category of visitor, with whom I solicited interviews in person by initiating contact, explaining the project, and asking for their time. Day trippers and male respondents in particular comprise this set. A second adjustment I made deliberately was to ensure that I had a wide sample of respondents in regard to where in particular they stayed on the island because of the extent to which visitors themselves emphasised **their own choice of place** (**'We have always, always stayed in the Muir¹⁷⁷ hotel'**; **'White Water feels like a second home to me'**; **'I can't imagine coming to Iona and not being at the hostel'**)¹⁷⁸ This is also indicated in Appendix I.

The respondents had to be **'visitors'** in some capacity, which I understood to mean that their stay on Iona **had to be a 'visit' and not a permanent residence** (see discussion in Chapter Two); and they had to also not be employed (whether as paid **staff or as volunteers**) **in any of the island's properties**. For this reason, say, a volunteer in Iona hostel - even if it was her first time of visiting the island, and even if she volunteered explicitly for the purpose of visiting the island (as one volunteer told me she had), would not be a primary respondent in this study. I did, however, speak to many such people on the island - in some cases recording interviews with them, too. They have become part of the supplementary material in this thesis and,

¹⁷⁷ The name of the hotel has been changed. As far as possible, I have changed names for any properties mentioned. This is explained in Appendix I.

¹⁷⁸ This will be studied in more detail in Chapter Five

at points, have been included in this study in order to tease out broader themes or to bring out points of contrast.

The bulk of the interviews were undertaken one-on-one. That is, they involved individual respondent interviews recorded digitally and lasting between 50 and 70 minutes. However, there was a small percentage of interviews which took place with me interviewing two respondents simultaneously. Most often, this happened with couples or with close friends who had travelled up together. I have indicated in the Appendix I where this is the case. After my return from the field, every respondent was contacted through the e-mail address they had provided to me. I re-iterated my project, my thanks for their consent, and asked them to let me know if they wanted to withdraw from it at any point. With the exception of one respondent, who had concerns that they would be identified and so asked for certain parts of their interview to be either carefully cloaked - or wholly redacted - no other respondents wrote back with any concerns or problems.

After the period of data-collection, I worked with the data over roughly four phases. First, I transcribed the longer interviews manually. During the transcription process, I did not follow a chronological order, but instead tried to ensure that I was working with a range of interviews (visitors living in different places on the island, a mix of female and male visitors, younger and older visitors and so on). This was to make sure that even during my early days of transcription, that I was not swayed to representing the views of any one particular demographic. Second, I used two interviews in particular as ‘test’ cases for analysis, for working on ethnographic style, and for using the framework of specialness. I presented extensively on these

two cases- to a departmental writing group and at conferences, providing (edited) voice-recordings, written transcripts as well as my own analysis. I used the feedback I received to guide my technique - in balancing editorial/authorial voice with the **voice of the respondent and in understanding some of the 'vocabulary' of specialness on Iona.**

I then **began 'coding' the rest of my data using N-Vivo.** However, shortly after beginning the process, I realised that it to some extent exceeded and over-complicated what I was trying to find out. This was partly because I was working using a highly technical and specific linguistic tool to deal with respondent data that was linguistically fuzzy. That is when I decided to move instead to the model of **identifying 'clusters' of descriptions about Iona that would allow me to study the concept in general.** This attention to **'clusters' has resulted in Chapter Six of this thesis, with its attention to 'safety', 'connectedness' and Iona as 'out-of-time'** (all three being clusters that I was working with). Finally, during the writing process, and especially before the preparation of the first draft of this work, I repeatedly went back to the interviews gathered - not to the transcripts, but to the original sound recordings - to add substance and colour to any ethnographic description and analysis I was doing. At this time, I also made sure that the interviews excerpts used in this thesis represented a cross-section of people I spoke with on the island and curated the photographs that would be provided with the excerpts from each respondent.

Island residents in this thesis

Island residents were also a key part of my data collection for this thesis. My own living arrangements from the second month onwards were largely at the behest of islanders (I detail this in a later section), and numerous formal and informal conversations I had with islanders clarified particular aspects of Iona's contemporary life and shaped some of the concerns of this thesis. Some islanders graciously contributed time to doing recorded interviews. My own attendance at community events - parish church services, village hall events, the music festival, coffee mornings, Community Council meetings - meant also that I was, for a short while, part of or witness to particular island discussions: on whether or not applications from ministers in same-sex relationships would be considered for the locum post in the Church of Iona and the Ross of Mull, on the feasibility of wind turbines on the island as a source of green energy, on allocations of houses for the housing project. While these are not necessarily visitor concerns, they do have a bearing on visitorship - some more than others. Why then do islanders not feature more prominently in this thesis?

There are two reasons for this deliberate emphasis, both to do with expediency and research conditions. First, **that Iona's small resident population of 143 islanders, means its residents are often easily 'placed' - there is, say, only one 'postie' (a common Scottish nickname for the postman) and one hostel owner, and identifying someone as (say) working 'on the Staffa boats' - to the neighbouring island of Staffa - would mean casting the net across four or five people at most. This thesis' engagement with rich data and the need to, at times, 'locate' the speaker by using demographic detail (age, gender, where they stayed for instance) means that**

protection of privacy would be difficult, if not impossible, were islanders themselves the subjects of the work. Second, that as residents of a prominently **tourist island with a clear ‘seasonality’ (the tourist season lasts, roughly, from the beginning of Easter until October, the months of July and August are busiest)**, Iona’s islanders may have found official participation in such a study inconvenient and ill-advised during a busy time.

* * * *

Fieldwork Practice

Harry F. Wolcott, addressing what is for him a key tension in ethnography, writes about the challenge of both trying to fairly represent the subjects of fieldwork while **still trying ‘to circumvent the ultimate conceit of fieldwork that it is our calling and obligation to make sense of somebody else’s sense-making’**¹⁷⁹. As Erickson has **noted, this requires dispensing with the ‘pretense of a scientific objectivity’** and replacing it instead with what anthropologist Margaret Mead has termed a **‘disciplined subjectivity.’**¹⁸⁰ In order to achieve this, Wolcott recommends that certain steps be taken: that the project and its aims is made explicit, that the means by which the study is initiated are made clear, that the knowledge base **shows depth and range, that respondents’ own words** are used when possible, and that responses to drafts be solicited¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁹ Harry F. Wolcott, *Ethnography: A way of seeing* (New York: AltaMire Press 1999), p. 139.

¹⁸⁰ Frederick Erickson, **‘What Makes School Ethnography “Ethnographic?”** in *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (1973): 10-19.

¹⁸¹ Wolcott, *Ethnography*, p. 141.

My emails to islanders, my attempts to introduce myself to them and the dissemination of my research notes were my way of cultivating transparency, and **my decision to be ‘where the action is’¹⁸² (to use Erving Goffman’s phrase): in public places, or outdoors, or visitor hubs, was vital to presenting myself as open and available.** I tried to be, to use a colloquial expression, everywhere and all at once. When there were any public events advertised - coffee mornings, dances, public meetings, concerts - I made sure to attend. My daily schedule typically involved moving between three or four places through the course of the day. For instance: I might spend a morning at the jetty, doing observation work, an afternoon doing my shift in the Heritage café (my role as kitchen pot-washer was less sociable, but my later graduation to waitress made me more visible), and the evening in the Abbey grounds and then in the pub. On some days, I shuttled between several places doing **what might be called ‘rounds’: a two-hour walk along the road from the North End of the island through to the Golf course. This was a kind ‘wandering’ as a way of managing the field-work space.** And if wandering exposed me to a wider variety of island places and people, it also made me visible in those same places. It helped that I was recognisable (there were no other smallish, short-haired, Indian women doing research on the island). After my fieldwork was over, I held a preliminary **‘sharing’ with members of the public. This event was attended by twenty people in total - a combination of island residents, seasonal staff and visitors.** More detail on this event is provided in the Conclusion and, particularly, in Appendix III.

¹⁸² Erving Goffman, *Where the Action Is* (London: Penguin Press, 1969).

Participant Observation

Michael Agar posits that the ethnographer's task is two-fold. First, that she must find patterns in data that may seem disjointed and second, that she must do this by **occupying a role similar to that of a 'student-child-apprentice-learner.'**¹⁸³ In terms of the asymmetrical relationship of power that this creates, Agar posits that we see it as a **'one-down' relationship, where the placement of the ethnographer as a student or as a child places her firmly as a place 'one-down' from that of her informants or respondents.** This **'one-down' relationship is what enables learning,** the kind of learning that ethnographers need in order to enter and participate in the field, to take place. But Agar is sensitive to changes in the role of the ethnographer, **too. He writes that the 'one-down' position may only be at the start** of research. As the research proceeds, the equation of power between the ethnographer and her subjects may change. In his words,

Perhaps some group members will never let you go one-down: You are always in the dominant role as far as they are concerned. On the other hand, some relationships will move to symmetry. Or, to "dejargonize" for a moment, you'll make friends.¹⁸⁴

Agar's model usefully emphasises that the role of the ethnographer lies in learning through doing, which is also attentive to changes in the relative power of the ethnographer. In contrast to seeing ethnographers as either located on the **'outside'** or **'inside'** of their fieldsite, **Agar suggests that clear-cut insider/outsider** distinctions need to be questioned. Clifford, for instance, says of participant observation that it is **'shorthand for continuously tacking between the "inside" and**

¹⁸³ Michael H. Agar, *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 194.

¹⁸⁴ Agar, *The Professional Stranger*, p. 120.

“outside” of events: on the one hand grasping the sense of the specific occurrences and gestures empathetically, on the other stepping back to situate these meanings in wider contexts.¹⁸⁵ Clifford goes on to say that, in order to understand participant observation and to take it seriously, we need to acknowledge that dialectical relationship between experience and interpretation. Clifford argues that the **emphasis on the experience of the fieldworker as the ‘unifying source of authority in the field’ should instead shift to understanding fieldwork, and ethnography in particular, more as a *process* of interpretation**¹⁸⁶.

Here, the distinction between ‘participating observer’ and ‘observing participant’ proved to be useful. Harvey Russell Bernard describes the participating observer as **‘outsiders who participate in some aspects of life around them and record what they can’**. In contrast, observing participants are described as **‘insiders [who] observe and record some aspects of life around them.’**¹⁸⁷ Both require detached study along with involvement, but the former prioritises a relationship of distance, interrupted by involvements in action whereas the latter foregrounds involvement with moments of reflection. During my time on Iona, I prioritised involvement over detachment, which meant that I was more of a ‘observing participant’ and less of a ‘participating observer’ even though my status between visitor (researcher) and resident (islander) was ambiguous. This involvement was partly ensured by the practise of ‘openness’ and second, by my attempts to be ‘where the action is’.

¹⁸⁵ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 34.

¹⁸⁶ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 34-35.

¹⁸⁷ H. Russell Bernard, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2013) p. 313.



Figure 3.5 | Events on Iona: fieldwork photographs

From top left: Wildflower Walk, Iona Open tournament, Boat Race, Music Festival - North End venue

An indicative list of some of the events that I attended, in the course of my five main months of fieldwork runs thus: the inauguration of the new housing project on **the Glebe site**, an artistic exhibition on the bell in **St. Oran's Chapel**, the annual Iona **six-a-side football tournament**, the annual **football disco**, Iona's annual **Golf Tournament**, the annual **Golfing Disco**, a theatre performance from **Mull's An Tobar** company, an auction and jumble sale at the Abbey at the close of season, a harp concert in the library, the lifeboat sale, a MacMillan coffee morning in the library, and a choir performance by schoolchildren in the Abbey. Other events that I took part in included: a wildflower walk (run by an islander once each month), midnight rounds for corncrake counting (done by the National Trust Ranger), Iona's **Boat Race** - in which the owner of Iona's Hostel kindly allowed me and another volunteer to

be part of his team, the Monday ceilidh hosted by the Iona Community, a drum circle in the village hall, a reiki workshop in the North End, a labyrinth walk on **Martyr's Bay, a choir-singing event in Fingal's Cave (in the island of Staffa), and** Iona Village Hall Music Festival, where I was a volunteer. I was given permission to **join for part of the National Trust's Thistle Camp** - a twice-yearly volunteer-run work week on Iona, helping with beach cleaning in the north and north-west of Iona, **clearing gorse and weeds in the south, clearing the labyrinths on Columba's Bay and** making the gardening plot attached to the primary school fit-for-purpose. From being an attendee at two fascinating discussions among parish church-goers on whether or not to **follow or to break with the General Assembly of Scotland's** decision to allow ministers in same-sex relationships to take up posts, I became a participant of-sorts in counting, verifying and acting as witness to the final result. I was also, to my surprise, **invited to speak to the students in Iona's Primary School about schools in India. I was a 'regular' at the Wednesday meditations in the** Findhorn house, and at the Parish church service on Sunday and I made sure to attend the following weekly or daily events at least three times through the course of my fieldwork: the Iona Community pilgrimages every Tuesday, services at the **Bishops' House, services at the Catholic House of Prayer, and services at the Iona** Community.

The various events and situations listed in the previous section should give some **account for what this 'action' meant on Iona. This echoes my observation in the** previous section that my participation in these events worked in two ways. As a fieldwork researcher trying to understand the functioning of the island-at-large as **a visitor spot, they all comprised 'data'.** I did not carry a journal to them and make notes while they occurred (though I did always have my Dictaphone and camera

handy), but I was nonetheless ‘on-duty’, making notes in my journal at the end of day. But my presence at these gatherings became a way for me to be visible and available to any one - visitors or other - who would care to speak with me. Nearly every event I attended resulted in some sort of conversation with another visitor (or even seasonal staff or an islander) about my research. Importantly, often these conversations did not come about because I introduced myself as a researcher or because people had seen my note. On Iona, as with other places of tourism, tourist sociability means that visitors speak with other visitors (I will take this up on the discussion on ‘connectedness’ in Chapter Six). Importantly, because some of these events were attended by visitors as well as islanders and seasonal staff, my involvement **did not end with ‘visitorship’** but had repercussions for my place within the island-at-large.

* * * *



Figure 3.6 | My ‘positions’ on Iona:

Left: Job notice for Village Hall cleaner; Right: Service Area, Iona Cafe

The village hall needed a cleaner, read a notice on the notice board. A rate of pay was advertised and the job seemed to be easy and flexible - only two hours of work per week. I applied for the job and was given it. With the job came an introduction

to the village hall and the usual ‘roster’ of events that took place in it and a set of keys to boot. Two weeks later, on one of my usual outings to Iona’s café, I noted how rushed the service was and how many people were bustling in and out the door (a cruise ship was docked in the Sound at the time, and I was new enough to the island to not make the connection). Taking a chance, I asked if they needed any extra hands on deck. ‘Are you looking for work?’ came the reply, and I unhesitatingly said that I was. By the end of that week, I had my second job: pot-washer in the café. I worked in the café for three days a week and, by the time my fieldwork ended, I was pot-washer (or ‘Kitchen Porter’) and waitress, occasionally taking turns on the till. In the five months that I was on the island, I therefore did three kinds of ‘jobs’ regularly¹⁸⁸: café work, the cleaning of the village hall and PhD interviews and observations. I did other kinds of one-off work, too: a volunteer steward during Iona’s music festival, helping with the wool-sorting for the Craft shop, house-sitting and pet-sitting for a few families when they were away, and beach cleaning with the National Trust for Scotland, during their organised ‘work weeks’ on the island (called ‘Thistle Camps’).

To me, these were fortunate occurrences. They made my role of ‘observing participant’ more viable and I reasoned that these varied opportunities to work would give me access to a side of the island I might not be able to access otherwise: notably, the provision of hospitality. To keep with Goffman’s formulation of ‘front’ and ‘back’ regions, addressed in Chapter Two¹⁸⁹, this could be seen as a backstage,

¹⁸⁸ Note: I did not take any payment for the job as hall cleaner, nor for my job in the café on the principle that it might cause a conflict of ethics. Both of my ‘employers’ were aware of my reasoning (though neither, I should add, was particularly comfortable with the idea of having labour-for-free).

¹⁸⁹ Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, pp. 65-69.

where the work of hospitality was done. My time on the island made the simplicity of this view difficult to uphold at times - the Iona Village Hall Festival, after all, catered not just to visitors but to islanders themselves, the café served islanders **too, the volunteers who worked for NTS' Thistle camp were, themselves, visitors.** In this regard, the village hall was the exception. It represented a 'centre' for the island, one that, while it was open to visitors in particular circumstances - concerts, dances, auctions or other such events - was more usually a hub for islanders: playgroups, school concerts, film screenings. The hall was a shared place and a resource - like most other places on Iona - but, in contrast to many other places, the islanders seemed to command most of the share (I address the implications of this twice: in chapter four's discussion of respondent 'Rob' and the discussion on 'hidden things' in chapter seven).

In this regard, my job as village hall cleaner put me in a curious position. My later conversations with islanders, towards the end of my fieldwork, were helpful in clarifying how my actions may have been interpreted by those on the island: notably, as a desire to be involved with the everyday life of the island. Researchers are not a novelty on Iona - the previous summer, there had been a geologist living on the island for several months, someone told me; the summer of 2015 when I was there, I met another doctoral student from the University of Edinburgh - a historian, working on the island - and one of my respondents was a geologist doing his own undergraduate research on Iona. When I revisited the island for two months in the **summer of 2017, there was a team of archaeologists researching the St. John's cross** and responses to it. However, my volunteering as cleaner of the hall (I am told) **read as: a willingness to 'help out' with islander life and moreover, as a willingness** to put in some work during my time on the island.

At the time of my entry I was a young, female, Indian, student, who had been to Iona once before and who was to stay, for the most part, in the campsite - the cheapest accommodation on the island. Bluntly, I occupied what could be considered positions of low-status (female, immigrant, dish-washer, tourist). My five months on the island solidified this status in some ways, some of them through my own urging. The two other jobs I held on the island were what would be classified as **‘unskilled labour’**: I was cleaner for the village hall and pot-washer in the café. There were also small things I’d done (or not done) that helped to reinforce my low status. For one, I dressed like most visitors: waterproof trousers, waterproof jacket, **wellington boots, backpack, wearing no markers of my ‘researcher’ position.** Finally, there is the fact of my itinerancy. While the campsite and hostel rotation I kept to in my first month ended because of the kindness of islanders who opened up their homes and sheds to me - a gift I accepted gratefully - I made sure to never stay in one place for very long. The longest I stayed in the same place at a time, was a nine-day long **‘house-sit’ for a family on the island. The rest of my time was** spent rotating through various properties: sheds, spare rooms, the hostel. If, as I have shown earlier, some part of visitor status is drawn from fixed-ness to the extent that some visitors see the places in which they stay as formative in their experiences of Iona, I had in fact little fixed-ness to benefit from. I was an anomaly to available categories, which placed me in a fruitful research position.

* * * *

Itinerancy as practice

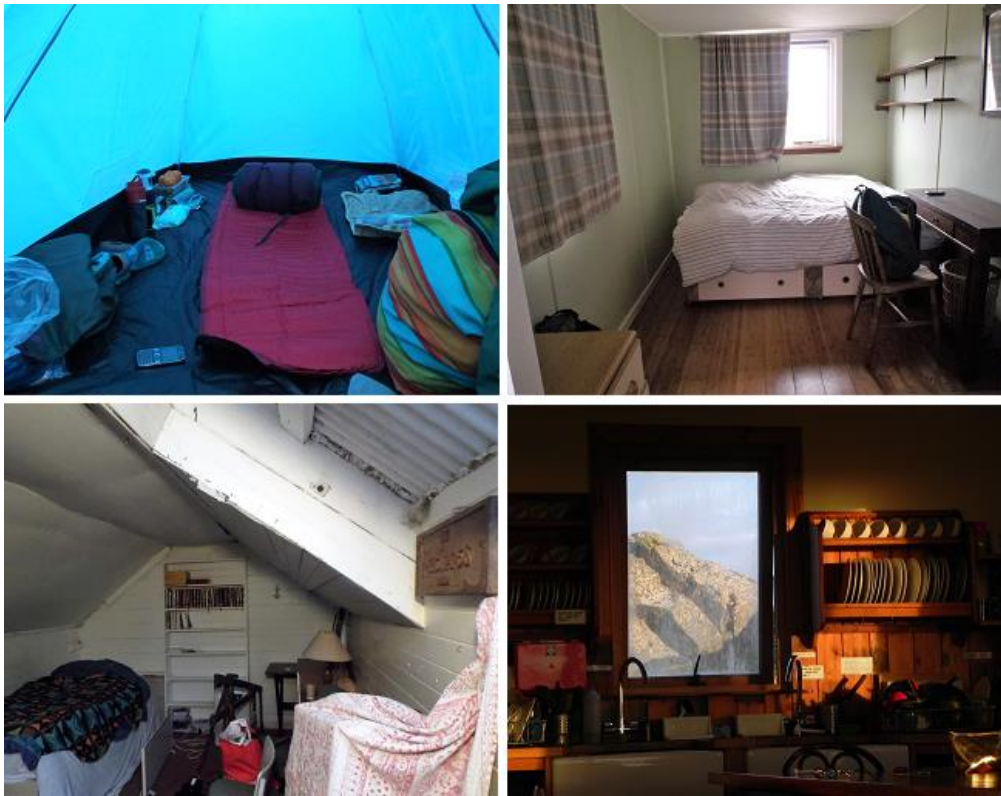


Figure 3.7| My 'homes' on Iona

From top left: Interior of tent; Shed behind family home; Back room inside Café Bothy; Hostel room

My fieldwork on the island lasted for a total of five and half months. In that time, I **had a total of seven 'homes', moving constantly between them.** The island is an expensive place in terms of tourist accommodation - the cheapest option for a bed on the island, at the time of my research, was Iona Hostel - at 23 pounds sterling per night. Hiring a cottage for the summer would have been financially out-of-reach (and more likely, impossible, since most visitor accommodation is booked out in advance). I did not, at the time, know anyone on the island with whom I could lodge. My solution was camping. I devised a rotation: three nights at the campsite and one night at the hostel. Going to the hostel occasionally was a logistical

necessity: the campsite had, at the time of my research, no cooking facilities and no way to wash clothes or charge electronic devices. Between a bed in a shared **dormitory and the inside of my tent, I had two homes. My 'homes' moved** - quite literally: different rooms or bunks in the hostel, different spots in which I pitched my tent at the campsite - but the system worked well for the most part. The summer of my fieldwork was unseasonably cold and blustery. The flowers were more than a month late in blooming, islanders told me, and there were gale-force winds once or twice a week through June and mid-July. My tent and I weathered three gales during this period but, from July onwards, my living arrangements shifted substantially.

Towards the end of my first month, an islander I had interviewed for the project **spoke with me about a shed they had at the back of their house. The shed wasn't** insulated, she said, but it had a bed, a desk, a chest of drawers and its own small bathroom. I luxuriated in my new lodgings, and tried in vain to pay back the family for letting me stay - they accepted none and I will always be in their debt. The day **after I moved into the shed, I was given a job in Iona's café. The owners mentioned** that they knew I was staying in a tent (they did not know that I had recently moved up in the world): Would I like to have bed and board in a bothy in the back of the café that doubled up as a storage place for café supplies? My fieldwork journal notes my own amusement at having no home on Iona to having been offered two in a matter of a few days. I considered accepting one and not the other, but it struck me that moving around between different places might afford interesting vantage points each time, and might give me access to different people and environments. I said yes to both and decided to shuttle between the two places. But as I stayed on

in the island, my ‘homes’ seemed to increase with each month. Two families were kind enough to think of me as a house-sitter while they were away, which meant for me the tremendous luxury of having two houses all to myself (both families had pets, which only increased my enjoyment). In return for a few evenings of pot-washing in one of the hotels, I asked to stay in staff accommodation for a few days. In total, I stayed in eight places during my fieldwork period: the tent, the hostel, staff accommodation at the hotel, staff bothy at the café, a shed in the back of a house, and three houses. While there were places and homes to which I returned (most notably the shed and the bothy), I made sure that I stayed in no place for longer than a week at a stretch. I developed rituals: moving in, arranging my things, nesting for a few days, packing up my things, and carrying my rucksack to the next place. **‘So, where are you staying now?’ I was asked a few times by islanders who** knew of my peculiar arrangements, I was pleased to answer differently each time.

My own itinerancy was, at first a product of circumstance but later become an important methodological principle. My work, after all, was about visitors: subjects in motion. I thought it appropriate to be myself a ‘subject-in-motion’: not rooted to any fixed place on the island, and constantly on the move. But there were more practical advantages, too. I have written earlier about the importance of my own **‘visibility’ to the collection of data. In this context, my multiple homes worked in** my favour - they were in different parts of the island, for one, meaning that my base shifted each time and I thereby became visible to different groups of people. Further, following Tweed, all observations come from a particular vantage point and to that end, in the context of a thesis on multivalency, it helped that I had

several¹⁹⁰. I lived in staff accommodation, visitor accommodation and islander homes. For a thesis on visitor experiences, it proved helpful to be aware of what visitors could access (the hostel and campsite, for instance) but also what might be out of reach - staff quarters and homes. By a curious token, the same lesson applied in reverse, too. Islanders do not stay in hostels, hotel staff do not live in tents - it was a strange kind of knowledge that I gained, but I could only have gained it because I was mobile and not fixed to any one **place**. In fact, the ‘rounds’ I did, **from one temporary accommodation to another, mirror the ‘rounds’ I did for the purpose of data collection: doing observations in the jetty, before moving to a different location for the afternoon, and then another for the evening and so on.** This was a kind of methodological itinerancy, harmonious with a research project on visitors: subjects on the move.

* * * *

The walking interview

My interest with this project was to understand the dense realities - **the ‘thick descriptions’** - of visitor experiences¹⁹¹. Where do visitors go, what do they do, what do they photograph, whom do they speak with, and how do they represent this? As the previous chapter clarified, the overall aim was to question the relationship that visitors constructed with the island of Iona. That is, I wanted my understanding of **visitors’ experiences to be embedded in a clear sense of place. As a response to my stated motivation, I devised the principle method used for this thesis: ‘walking**

¹⁹⁰ Thomas A. Tweed, ‘On Moving Across: Translocative religion and the interpreter’s position’ in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 70, no. 2 (2002): 253-277.

¹⁹¹ Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture’ in *Turning Points in Qualitative Research: Tying knots in a handkerchief* 3 (1973): 143-168.

interviews' that lasted about an hour and followed a consistent semi-structured format.

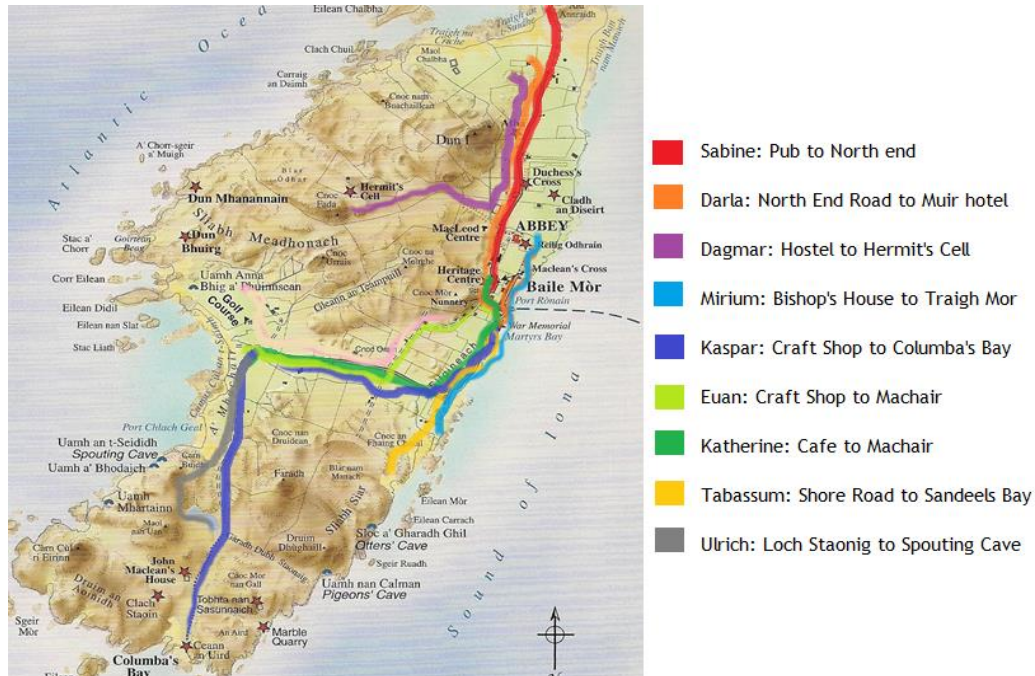


Figure 3.8 | Illustration of respondent walking routes

The premise of these walking interviews was that, if one is to find out how people make and understand their relationship to place, **'place' should feature as an** integral part of the interview environment. Of course, this is always the case - all interviews happen *somewhere*: in a room, for instance, perhaps across a table. The logic of these walking interviews was to have visitors engage with the island and its places in an immediate way, and to take account of their surroundings, *as the interview was taking place*. Accordingly, the respondent was told that we could go wherever they pleased, and we decided the topological start and end points of the interview accordingly. All respondents were also given a camera at the start of the interview, and told that they were free to take photographs if they wished (most

did). Conversations were recorded using a dictaphone. This means that every respondent who participated in the long-form interview left three kinds of records: visual, auditory and - for want of a better word- cartographic.

The image above shows nine walking routes taken by a broad set of respondents, indicating the range of walks that contributed to the data set for this thesis. The interviews opened with me asking the respondent about the details of their current trip on Iona (where were they from, how long were they staying, where were they staying, had they visited before). From that point, each interview proceeded along a very broad structure that included: questions about specific places on Iona that they had visited, questions about the walk or the place we were in, questions about other visitors on the island and their observations, questions about themselves, questions about how they related to the island, or what they thought of it. Interviews usually closed with me asking respondents to describe what they might like to see protected about Iona on the basis of their visit and what they might like to see changed - a question that often allowed respondents to bring together what they had said about the island before, and reflect on what they felt to be most important about it.

There are two aspects of these walking routes, indicated in the map, worth mentioning. First, that most of the walks began on the road but their final destinations required going off-road, whether that was to access the sweep of the ocean at the machair, or to reach the rocks in the North End. Some walks were more off-road than they were on-road: on the map, this is reflected in Ulrich, Tabassum and Kaspar's walk. **Second, that some of the routes picked were more common than**

others. On the map, for instance, it is evident that Sabine and Darla's route, for instance, was broadly similar (though moving in separate directions) and that the same stretch of road between the village centre at the turn towards the machair **(what is called the 'shore road')** had been traversed several times, as part of different walks: on the map, Kaspar, Katherine, Mirium and Tabassum all took that route. The duplication was always interesting because it struck at the heart of the thesis - the multiple meanings of place, and the complex interactions of people within them. This is clearly shown in the comparison of the duplicated walking routes of two visitors: Ben and Sabine.

An illustration

Ben and Sabine both took me to the North End, but their assessments of it were very different. Another respondent, Beth (not marked on the map but we will meet her in chapter six) also did a walk in the North End, but hers was a different route entirely - staying in the north beaches, and then moving westwards: she was revisiting a favourite walking route from when she and her family camped on Iona, **when she was a child. This meant that I 'saw' these places differently each time,** for not every respondent walked the same way, paused at the same places, or described what they were seeing (when they chose to do so) in the same way. But perhaps the clearest illustration of different experiences of a broadly similar route are the photographs that respondents took¹⁹².

¹⁹² The photographs in this section have all been taken by respondents themselves. Wherever this is the case in the thesis at large, they have been captioned to reflect this **with the respondent's name mentioned.**

A comparison: the North End **with 'Ben' and 'Sabine'**

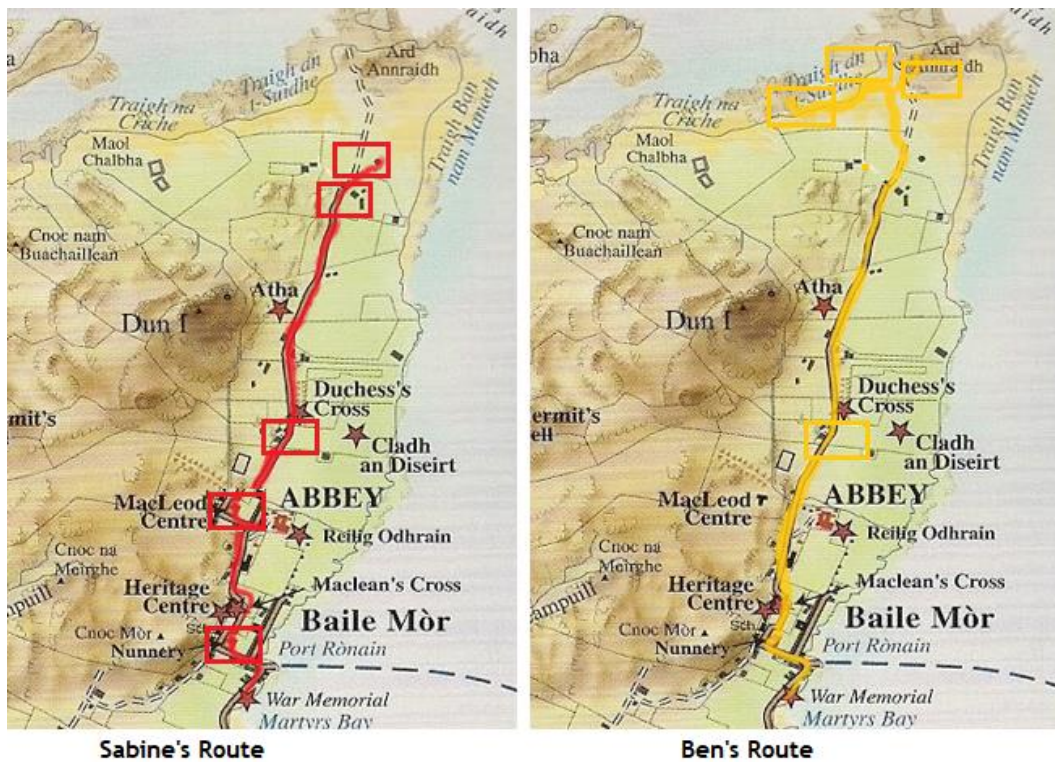


Figure 3.9| Comparison of North End walking routes

Ben is a university student visiting Iona in July. He is there for a research project in geology. He is staying at a campsite on the neighbouring island of Mull. He will be here for about twenty days in total. He has been to Iona before: on a university trip earlier that year. 'You won't enjoy my photos though', Ben tells me when I hand the camera over to him, 'there'll be like rocks and grass and stuff'. I re-assure him, saying that letting him photograph what he likes, is precisely the point.

We are standing near the Abbey when this exchange takes place, having started our walk from the jetty up to the North End, to the cluster of rocks - **an 'unconformity'** in geological terms - that he will be sampling that day. It does not take long for Ben

to take his first photograph. It is of the Sound of Iona - the stretch of water that separates the island from Mull. There's a Fault that runs through it, he tells me, very possibly relating to the unconformity that he is studying. The next three photographs come later, in the North End. He wants to show me 'Poo Valley' - a name given by the university group he had first visited the island with, to a small stretch near the beach because of the abundance of sheep droppings in the place. The next photograph is a broad shot of the North End unconformity, and the final photograph is a close shot of the rocks that he intends to sample. Taken together, these photographs stand as visual testimony of 'Ben's Iona'¹⁹³.



Figure 3.10 | Respondent photographs: 'Ben'

¹⁹³ Note: As with many respondents, Ben took more than four photographs. In total, he took five. The four presented here were selected by me from the larger pool of five. This practice - of selecting one or more photographs from a wider set of images produced by the respondent herself - has been kept to through this thesis.

We can now meet Sabine, on Iona with her girlfriend for a backpacking trip from the Netherlands. She is, like Ben, a student at a university. And, like Ben, she is camping, although she and her girlfriend are staying at the campsite on Iona, not on Mull. Their visit is to last three days. This is their first time to Iona. Limited space in their rucksacks means that she could not carry her SLR camera with her. 'I'm not taking pictures at all', she says. 'While normally I just take pictures of anything, and I have thousands of photos which I have to select. And now I am just being here, at the moment. Which is also for me, different...'

Sabine's photographs are varied, and most serve as reminders of the highlights of a walk she did the previous day: along the same route, with her girlfriend. They liked the Nunnery and were intrigued to hear about the 'Sheelagh-na-gigh' on the side wall ('there was this story of this naked woman keeping all the enemies out or something. So I had to walk like three walks around it because I really had to see where it was'). This is her first photograph. As we walk along the road, she stops outside a shop she went into the previous day. She liked the feel of it, she tells me ('It's so small, so you feel very connected to each other. So it's like very intimate'). This is her second photograph. Her third is of the Sound of Iona, but even as she takes it, she rues how the photograph does not capture how beautiful it looks ('It's really hard to take a good picture. We tried, like, the whole time. But it's not... you just can't. Even with the sea, you see, there's this beautiful blue...'). She takes two in the North End: of lambs resting and sheep chewing on the grass. She is excited by the sheep, and we look at them for a long while before turning back.



Figure 3.11 | Respondent Photographs: ‘Sabine’

Taken together, Ben and Sabine’s photographs make evident how differently they ‘saw’ Iona and what they found exciting or valuable about it. Ben, the geologist here on work, is interested almost entirely in the rocks he is working upon. His photographs reflect these priorities clearly: they each have something to do with **his own project**. In contrast, Sabine’s ‘Iona’ is more varied: a site of archaeological and historical interest, a shop, a photograph of the view from the island, and sheep grazing in the North End. This is harmonious with what she says later about Iona, that she sees it as a place of art, artistic beauty and nature. The contrast in their positions is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the fact that both take photographs of the Sound, but for very different reasons - **Ben’s curiosity is directed towards** what lies under the surface of the water, and in whether that causes the ‘unconformity’ that he is studying; **whereas Sabine’s interest is in the view itself**, and the different shades of blue that make the image scenic. There are similarities,

too. For both, the photographs they take of the island are markers of the ‘past’: Ben documents the places that he has been studying, Sabine’s photographs document a walk she did the previous day. But equally, the photographs enter both respondents into a relationship with the future - notably that they are part of an interpretation of the island that is still in the making. Ben still has to finish his project, the rock formations he has photographed are still **‘a problem to be solved’** (this is his own phrasing). For Sabine, who is halfway through her stay on the island and expresses a desire to understand Iona better: she wants to know about the Nunnery (where her Sheelagh-na-gigh photograph was taken), and more about the arts on Iona (which the colourful packaging in the shop she photographs made her **think of**); **she wants to spend more time with the sheep. In this way, Sabine’s** photographs are not just artefacts of the past, they represent the curiosities she **still has about the island. They are her attempts to ‘compose’ the island itself, and** the composition is still not complete (this will be taken up again in Chapter Five).

Here, then, is the final similarity between Ben and Sabine - that in selecting their photographs, they also compose a place for themselves on the island. Ben says, **‘People come here for the abbey [and] it kind of makes me a bit sad, because there’s incredible stuff here that is completely, like, almost the opposite.’** He means the rocks, which he finds to be the most interesting part of Iona (**‘To me, Iona is an interesting piece of rock’** he says in so many words) but also, I am suggesting, the part of Iona in which he can most readily locate himself. Sabine says similarly, **noting that Iona has quite different aspects and she feels like she fits ‘with the arts** thing, a little bit. With the nature, yes. With the sheeps, yes. But not with the **religious part’.** Her photographs, **coincidentally, are all of aspects of the place** within which she fits, and the aspect that she does not see herself as belonging to

(‘religion’) is absent: there are not photographs of the Duchess’ cross and of the Abbey, both of which she identifies as places of religion (we can note that the Abbey does not feature in Ben’s set either, even though he and I paused to talk about it, without entering the premises). The photographs, themselves exercises in the composition of place, also become exercises in self-composition *within* place. Ben and Sabine’s photographs of Iona stand as not simply what they regard as ‘Iona’ but also the ‘Iona’ in which they have made a place for themselves.

It is worth noting that some respondents preferred not to walk at all. For them, we did seated interviews in a particular place of their choice, but always making sure **to engage with the place itself (‘why did you choose this room?’ ‘do you come here often?’)**. I also devised a shorter twenty-five minute version for day-long visitors. In order to arrange these, I usually made contact with day-trippers who were leaving the boat and solicited interviews. For any who agreed, I met them at the jetty on their departure from the island, taking the ferry with them, and waiting until they left for the bus to Craignure.

It also means that **this research resembles what George Marcus calls ‘multi-sited ethnography’ which considers several field-sites** but with the aim to embed them within a **larger ‘world’ that** is still in construction. He distinguishes this kind of ethnography from single-site research (such as archival research, for instance) which aims to apply a wider system to the study of a single, bounded site. In contrast, multi-sited ethnography, for Marcus, collapses the distinction between **the world ‘out there’ and the field-work site on the ground. The ethnographer’s task in this instance ss to identify ‘systemic’ realities in ‘local’ places, studying the**

world system directly on the ground. This means a rejection of the conception of a bounded site and the willingness to instead follow people and their stories as they themselves moved between different places and media¹⁹⁴.

Marcus argues that multi-sited ethnography is particularly suited to projects that are themselves interdisciplinary, referring to the convergences between anthropology - his own academic background - and feminist studies, cultural studies, media studies and so on. His logic is, because interdisciplinary areas do not share a clearly bounded object of study, the in-built scope for **'wandering' across different sites** in multi-sited ethnography can be especially fruitful. As Chapter Two demonstrated, the study of tourism - and religion and tourism particularly - has a long lineage of interdisciplinarity, presenting a consonance between the subject of study and the method of study. Norman, for instance, refers to the benefits of multi-sited ethnography for his own work, clarifying that he **'draws from different locations [Rishikesh and the Camino] to posit common thematic outcomes'**¹⁹⁵. This project, likewise, benefits from this focus on multiple sites. It also exhibits a particular quirk: that even the study of one place - the island of Iona - **can be 'multi-sited' through the recognition that Iona is not an abstract space, but comprised of a multitude of places within it.**

¹⁹⁴ George E. Marcus, **'Multi-Sited Ethnography' in Multi-Sited Ethnography: Problems and Possibilities' in the** *Translocation of Research Methods* (2011): 1995.

¹⁹⁵ Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*, p. 12.

4. Beyond Religion and Tourism

This thesis has been ‘placed’ in two wider contexts: first, within the academic field of tourism and religion and second, within the fieldwork site of Iona. This chapter brings these two strands into conversation to show the inadequacies of the religion and tourism framework when applied to Iona. Working through the case study of Iona Abbey, it identifies a two-fold challenge: the challenge of applying scholarly categories to populated and dynamic places, and the danger of obscuring wider narratives about Iona. It introduces Ann Taves’ work on ‘specialness’ with particular attention to how, for Taves, the special is a way to reframe the discussion on the ‘sacred’, a way of lightening the baggage that comes with terms like ‘religious’ and ‘religion’, a means of casting a wider ‘generic net’ that can allow us to address a wider set of understandings: the religious, the spiritual, the magical, the significant, the extraordinary, the holy. It shows that the concept of the ‘special’ can offer a useful solution to this challenge of studying ‘religion and tourism’ on Iona because of its frequent appearance in emic language, and its versatility as an analytical category. By showing the way in which Taves’ concept is modified and re-built in this thesis, this chapter sets up the detailed and systematic enquiry of ‘specialness’ provided in the second half of this thesis.

* * * *



Figure 4.1 | The ferry crossing the Sound of Iona

Iona Abbey

*You are on the upper decks of a ferry, making the crossing from the jetty at Fionnphort on Mull. There are people in front of you and you try to see past them: the island is approaching. You can see a row of houses lined along the shore, and to their right, the dull brown tower of Iona Abbey framed by a low, green hill. The cameras come out. The ferry stops, the ramp clangs against the slipway. You climb down, surrounded by people and the sound of rolling suitcase wheels. A small, **wooden sign on a house says ‘to the Abbey’**. You walk along the shops, turn right along the ruins of a Nunnery, past a school, past some gardens, winding left then right, past a hotel, going uphill, slowly, until you reach it: a low wall, the brown stone of the Abbey beyond it and the modern glass façade of a ticketing hut to your left¹⁹⁶.*

¹⁹⁶ The descriptive excerpts in this chapter have been composed using a combination of my own field notes and general impressions. They are illustrative and have therefore been marked out by the use of italics. This practice - of using italics to indicate descriptive

Iona Abbey is the largest structure on the island, both in terms of its size and in terms of its perceived importance. It is the lead photograph in the entry for Iona on most tourist websites and is usually listed first in the list of **‘things to do’** on Iona. The Iona Cathedral Trust - which has administered the Abbey since 1899 - leases out the Abbey to Historic Environment Scotland [HES] which administers the Abbey as a tourist site: operating the ticketing offices, providing tourist infrastructure such as information booklets, guided tours and a gift shop, managing the upkeep of the tourist spaces - (most of) the Abbey and its grounds, the museum behind the Abbey, **St. Oran’s Chapel, the Nunnery. It is Iona’s most lucrative ‘selling point’.** In the summer that I conducted my fieldwork on the island, the Abbey sold 57,838 tickets between May and October¹⁹⁷. At seven pounds and ten pence for a regular, adult **ticket, the Abbey’s calculable revenue is substantial** - and this without considering revenue earned from the sale of on-site products (from its well-stocked giftshop, or the guidebooks on sale in the ticketing hut) and from leasing the church to groups for occasions (such as weddings or concerts) ¹⁹⁸. **It is also one of the island’s largest** employers, with ten HES staff working in summer, and five of them working full-time, through the winter months (a rarer arrangement for an island that is at least in part regulated through seasons).

vignettes that have been composed using field-notes and observations - has been adhered to in the rest of the thesis.

¹⁹⁷ This number was obtained at a meeting of the Iona Liaison Group in October 2015, where I was in attendance. This was reported as a 1% increase from the previous year.

¹⁹⁸ The number from the summer I was present, again from the Liaison Group meeting: 6 weddings, 6 performances, 8 educational visits, 13 (special) services.

The Abbey stands on the site of the original sixth century Columban monastery, in an archaeologically rich area (a re-excavation of two trenches first excavated in 1956-1957 was conducted as recently as May 2017). The Abbey as it stands today is a composite structure: a product of different phases of building and rebuilding¹⁹⁹. The only visible remains of the monastery today are the monastic vallum enclosing **the site and the Tòrr an Aba ('Hill of the Abbot')** where Saint Columba is said to have had his writing hut. A small stone building next to the Abbey church - named St. Columba's Shrine - is a later addition, possibly dating from the ninth or tenth century. **The saint's relics are not kept in the shrine: they were transported in the** ninth century to Kells in Ireland along with other precious artefacts (including, it is said, the Book of Kells) as a protection against the increasingly frequent Viking raids in this period. The second major phase of building for Iona Abbey was undertaken in the early thirteenth century by Ragnall, **who was the titular 'Lord of the Isles'**. At this time, the Abbey was re-established under the Benedictine Order, and it remained such until the Reformation era when it fell into disrepair. With the exception of a short re-building attempt under Charles I, the Abbey stayed in ruins until it was gifted by the Eighth Duke of Argyll to the Iona Cathedral Trust in 1899, for the purpose of a re-building project. The Deed of Trust contained the following clause:

The cathedral shall be re-roofed and restored so as to admit of its **being used for public worship... and** Trustees will and may occasionally allow, as it may be convenient, the members of other Christian churches to hold services within the cathedral...²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ The account that follows has been synthesised using three sources: E. Mairi MacArthur, **'The island of Iona: Aspects of its social and economic history from 1750 to 1919'** [Unpublished doctoral thesis] (University of Edinburgh, 1989); Rosalind K. Marshall, *Columba's Iona: A New History* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press Ltd, 2013); Ian Fisher and John G. Dunbar, *Iona: A Guide to the Monuments* (Published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, 1995).

²⁰⁰ Sourced from MacArthur, **'The island of Iona'**, p. 364.

* * * *



Figure 4.2 | Crowds gather at St. Martin's Cross

You are in the Abbey grounds. There are people in waterproofs with walking sticks, people holding maps and audioguides. Someone is clipping the flowers in the garden. Visible through a small window halfway up the Abbey wall, someone appears to be washing dishes wearing bright yellow rubber gloves. A group is building at the base of one of the High Crosses: about twenty-five people, all in strong boots, waterproof trousers, waterproof coats. You notice that many of them wear pale green rubber wristbands. Someone in a fluorescent jacket is speaking to them, looking occasionally to a book she is holding in her hands. She reads

something aloud to the group, who bow their heads in silence for a moment before starting to sing. They walk slowly towards the Abbey gates. Another crowd collects at the cross, around someone with a name badge pinned to their black uniform. You hear snatches of what she is saying and with the low sound of the singing near the gates still audible, you walk into the quiet of the Abbey church.

Also involved with the everyday operation of Iona Abbey is the Iona Community: a Christian ecumenical community founded in 1938 by George MacLeod, then a Church of Scotland minister in Govan, Glasgow. While the headquarters of the Iona Community and its flagship publishing house - Wild Goose Publications - are based in Glasgow, the Community itself is a dispersed group with a network of ‘members’ (both lay and clergy), ‘associate members’ and ‘friends’ spread across the UK and other countries (prominently the USA, the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland). The Iona Community uses Iona as one of its island centres - a second being the youth-oriented Camas Centre on the neighbouring island of Mull. It ensures the continuation of daily worship at the Abbey, with services in the morning and evening on each day, as well as short fifteen-minute services at two pm during the summer season. It is the **island’s largest provider of employment (both paid and unpaid): with more than fifty staff and volunteers working across the two places of accommodation the Community maintains on the island, a small number of whom are also employed through the winter.**

The Iona Community was founded in post-war Depression-hit Govan, and as a response to it²⁰¹. MacLeod gathered a group of workmen and labourers as well as clergy for re-building Iona Abbey which was known to be in a state of neglect and **disrepair. ‘I’m going to get a team together. Will you come?’**, MacLeod is reported to have asked one of his then-assistants in Govan, who goes on to report that MacLeod then assembled a group **consisting of ‘an architect, a doctor, a secretary,** seven artisans, four trained ministers, and four in training. And there we were, **trying to work out the legacy of Columban Christianity.’**²⁰² This acknowledgement of the syncretism involved in the early stages of the Iona Community is made even more explicit in the *Iona Community Worship Book*, copies of which are kept in the Abbey and used during the services. It reads:

We are the inheritors of the Celtic tradition, with its deep sense of Jesus as the **head of all, and of God’s glory in all of creation... We are the inheritors of the Benedictine tradition, with its conviction that ‘to work is to pray’, its commitment to hospitality, and its sense of order....** And we are the inheritors of the tradition of the Reformers, with their evangelical zeal, their call to commitment, and their deep understanding of the continuing challenge to every generation to find new ways to touch the hearts of all.²⁰³

In the way that the Community’s grounding brings together three strands of Christian thought, MacLeod’s vision for the rebuilding of Iona Abbey was a ‘Common Life’ shared by workers and clergy alike. Today, the Community provides hospitality for paying guests and groups (who need not be Community members, or clergy

²⁰¹ The account that follows has been synthesised using two sources: E. Mairi MacArthur, ‘The island of Iona: Aspects of its social and economic history Anna Muir, *Outside The Safe Place: An oral history of the early years of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001); *Iona Community Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), p. 12

²⁰² As reported in Anna Muir, *Outside The Safe Place: An oral history of the early years of the Iona Community* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), p. 20. Uist MacDonald was the assistant in question, who later became a prominent figure in the Iona Community.

²⁰³ *Iona Community Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), p. 12.

themselves) on a regular Saturday to Thursday weekly rotation, with most weeks in the season being structured by a theme. Guests and Iona Community on-site staff and volunteers share communal meals, and guests are expected to help with chores (chiefly cleaning and washing dishes) for an hour each morning. Pinned to the notice board inside the refectory - where these meals are shared - is a brief account of the Community and its vision. **The text declares precisely, succinctly: ‘here, we do not see differences between the sacred and the secular’²⁰⁴.**

* * * *

Michel Foucault famously predicted that 'the present epoch [the twentieth century] will perhaps be above all the epoch of space'²⁰⁵. Yet, the comparatively sparse engagement of the field of Religious Studies with 'space' has been noted²⁰⁶ and conversely, it has been observed that Human Geographers and Cultural Geographers have not worked closely enough with theories of the religious.²⁰⁷ Despite this paucity in engagement, the scholarship around space and the religious has produced some provocative and creative work, often centered around the idea of 'sacred space'²⁰⁸. We have encountered the vocabulary of the sacred before: in the second chapter which noted it as one of the constituent terms frequently employed in the work of religion and tourism, **Erik Cohen used the ‘sacred’ to set apart pilgrimages**

²⁰⁴ A similar thought is expressed in the *Iona Community Worship Book* reads: **‘We desire to be fully human, with no division into the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’** *Iona Community Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2001), p. 11.

²⁰⁵ M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' [trans. Jay Miskowiec] in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité* no. 5 (October, 1984):46-49.

²⁰⁶ M.D. Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 4.

²⁰⁷ C. Park, 'Religion and Geography' in John Hinnells (ed), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 439-455.

²⁰⁸ David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (Eds.), *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Allan Grapard, **‘Flying Mountains and Walkers of Emptiness: Toward a Definition of Sacred Space in Japanese Religions’** in *History of Religions* 21, no. 3 (1982): 195-221; Martyn Smith, *Religion, Culture and Sacred Space* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

from tourism, reasoning that pilgrimages are journeys to a sacred centre, and tourism is a movement towards an exotic periphery²⁰⁹. The sacred here is contrasted with the exotic and moreover becomes one of the points that allows him to differentiate pilgrims - who seek it- from tourists - who do not. Thomas Bremer **argues that in 'sacred spaces' within a touristic context 'religion slips imperceptibly into touristic practice'**²¹⁰, creating a framework where 'sacred space' can encompass both religion and tourism. Dean MacCanell produces a creative application of the sacred through his argument that sightseeing within a modern touristic context revolves around the elevation of sights through what he terms **'sight sacralization'**. Part of the process of creating a tourist attraction, he argues, is marking off sites from similar objects through processes of **'framing and elevation'** and **'enshrinement'**²¹¹ - building 'attractions' that become sacred within a touristic framework.

These formulations show little agreement as to the boundaries of the sacred. If Erik Cohen sees the sacred as a point of distinction between the religious and the touristic, MacCanell locates it within the touristic mode and Bremer's scheme sees both co-existing within the fluid realm of **'touristic sacred space'**. To tease this out further: Cohen's 'sacred' is a necessary condition of the religious, Bremer's 'sacred' can accommodate the touristic along with religious, and from MacCanell we get a bolder hypothesis that the sacred does not need the religious at all because the structure of a tourist site- any tourist site - contains an attraction made sacred. We

²⁰⁹ Erik Cohen, 'A Phenomenology of Tourist Experiences' *Sociology* 13, no. 2 (1979): 179-201;

²¹⁰ Thomas Bremer, *Blessed with Tourists: The Borderlands of Religion and Tourism in San Antonio*, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 144.

²¹¹ MacCannell, *The Tourist*, pp. 41-47.

can add even more to this: Olsen and Timothy propose that religious tourism involves visitors to **'sacrosanct sites that have been ritually separated from the profane space of everyday life,'**²¹² upholding the distinction between the sacred and the profane in places of religion and tourism. Finally, there is the writing on mass tourism that sees commercial and mass-produced touristic structures to be not simply separate from, but *opposed to the sacred*. Using the terms **'McDonaldization'** and **'Disneyfication'**, Ritzer and Liska argue that when churches and places of worship (**'sacred spaces'**) are brought into an organised touristic framework, they lose their distinct qualities through a homogeneity of structure and the encouragement of underlying commercial interest.²¹³ In this theorisation, a space cannot be sacred, once tourism has entered it.

To some extent, this is an inevitable outcome for a term that, even in its scholarly formulations outside of the specific area of **'religion and tourism'**, is contested and slippery. Veikko Anttonen notes a recent academic trend to avoid the use of the category **'sacred'** entirely because of its history as a covert theological term²¹⁴ while Willi Braun has noted its obscurantism²¹⁵. Consider, for example, the contrasting theorisation of the sacred by two theorists who have worked extensively with the category: Durkheim, and Mircea Eliade. Durkheim's definition of religions considered them as necessarily **'relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set**

²¹² Olsen and Timothy, *Tourism and Religious Journeys*, p. 3.

²¹³ Allan Liska and George Ritzer, **"McDisneyization" and "Post-Tourism": Complementary Perspectives on Contemporary Tourism'** in Rojek and Urry (Eds.) *Touring Cultures*, pp.96-113.

²¹⁴ V. Anttonen, 'Sacred' in J.R. Hinnells (ed), *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 272.

²¹⁵ In fact he reasons that its ambiguous meaning has led to its being used as a substitute for **'religion'** and **'holy'**. W. Braun, 'Religion' in W. Braun and R. T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide To The Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 10.

apart and forbidden...' Durkheim considered sacred things ('things set apart and forbidden'²¹⁶) to be essential building blocks to religions. However, Durkheim also clarifies that the sacred pre-dates and can exist outside of the religious, while the religious cannot exist outside of the sacred. In this way, not only is the sacred a constructed value by being 'set apart' and 'forbidden'; in extension, religion, too, is a construct. For Eliade, the 'sacred' was the nonhuman other - as a distinguishing presence that worked to partition times and spaces²¹⁷. The sacred became manifested through what he calls 'hierophanies'²¹⁸: eruptions of the sacred into the world, which altered the time and space that the religious man occupies. If Durkheim sees the sacred as constructed, and as a building block for religions, Eliade sees the sacred as an ontological reality, that creates a world-view that the 'religious man' lives within. Where does this leave Iona Abbey?

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Figure 4.3 | The two transepts of Iona Abbey

²¹⁶ E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955[1912]), p. 47.

²¹⁷ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1959), p. 13.

²¹⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 22.

Left: the transept featuring material from Historic Environment Scotland; Right: the transept featuring material from Iona Community.

*The thick walls of the Abbey muffle the sounds inside it: people shuffling down the aisle looking at the carvings on the wall, murmurs from visitors consulting their partners. You look at the displays around you: to your left, boards about the life of Columba and a modern-looking statue of him made in metal. To your right, more **display boards, some pamphlets on the table about nuclear disarmament ('Stop Trident'), the independence referendum ('Vote Yes')** and a wicker basket with **rainbow badges and white ribbons in it. It is two o'clock. Someone announces that** there will be a short service of prayer held inside the church and all are welcome to attend. Most people leave. You stay, taking seats near the choir stalls. The service lasts fifteen minutes, punctuated by the opening and closing of the doors. After it is finished, three uniformed staff and two men in tuxedos enter and start to re-arrange the chairs. A bouquet of white and pink peonies is placed on the altar, and you can see that paper programmes are being placed on seats. As you leave through the door leading back to the grounds, you can hear a bagpiper practising his tunes: first, Scotland the Brave and second, Here Comes The Bride.*

* * * *

Commenting on the contemporary interconnection between tourism and religion, Stausberg notes that religion is as affected by tourism and tourist structures as it is by migration and the media. Likewise, he notes that for many people, tourism involves 'exposure' to religion, even if the tourists are not themselves religious or spiritual²¹⁹. He uses this to emphasise the complexity of tourist sites: the layers of

²¹⁹ Stausberg, *Tourism and Religion*, p.15

interpretations they hold, and the kinds of infrastructure they may accommodate simultaneously²²⁰. Iona Abbey is nothing if not complex. In the division of labour and management of space, the Abbey simultaneously holds two different interpretations of the same place: living church and historic monument²²¹.

This simultaneity of interpretation is seen in the way its operations are shared between its two stake-holders: the Iona Community and Historic Environment Scotland. The details are established, the motions are practised and well-rehearsed. The Abbey grounds are tended to by HES while the care of the monastic quarters - what is now guest and staff accommodation for the Iona Community - is that of the Community's. Inside the Abbey church, a staff member of HES sweeps the floors, a staff member of the Iona Community looks to its supply of votive candles. The museum is maintained in the Abbey grounds by HES; the toilets are maintained outside of the Abbey grounds, by the Iona Community. Inside the Abbey, the south transept has a 'museum style' display about the life of Columba, put up by Historic Scotland; opposite it, in the North transept, there are parallel display boards about the work and rule of the Iona Community, and a table with pamphlets about the work that the Community is involved in. Around the courtyard of the Abbey are arranged: the gift shop of HES, the office of the director of HES, the offices of the Iona Community [note: there are plans to move the Iona Community offices to outside of the Abbey precincts], and a Chapter House with permanent displays about the Iona Community.

²²⁰ Stausberg, *Tourism and Religion*, pp. 58-59.

²²¹ Both these terms are 'emic'; The Iona Community services routinely used the language of 'living church'; and Historic Scotland's welcome board listed the Abbey as a 'monument' and, second, as a 'property'.

If we were to now apply some of the understandings of the sacred stated in the previous section: we could argue that the Abbey is sacred on account of its connection to religion or, conversely, on account of its status as a sacralised space of tourism. We could argue that the sacred is inconsonant with the religious, and that the tourist infrastructures in the Abbey mitigate or even negate its sacredness **or acknowledge that the sacred ‘inevitably interacts with other realms: the entrepreneurial, the social, and the political’²²². Using Douglas Davies’ understanding of sacred spaces as those in which a ‘sacred community’ resides or where the ‘divine word is spoken’²²³, we could argue that the continuing presence of worship at the Abbey church is the sign of its sacredness. Or we could note, that **because ‘heritage’ is as much the realm of the sacred as religion and spirituality are²²⁴, that the Abbey church’s status as a *historic* place is its surest sign of sacredness.** We could even shift the conversation out of the Abbey church itself and apply it to the wider Abbey precinct. If we apply the principle that the sacred is set-apart and protected by taboos, here are the different aspects of the Abbey grounds that can be counted: the music room above the choir stalls (where visitors are not allowed), the living quarters of the Iona Community (where only visitors who are staying for week-long programmes with the Iona Community are allowed), the Abbey museum (which is locked after five pm), the Michael Chapel (which, while it is kept open through the day, usually has its door shut - my on-site observations confirmed that few visitors go inside, interpreting the shut door and relative lack**

²²² S. Gill, 'Territory', p. 310.

²²³ Douglas Davies, 'Christianity' in Jean Holm with John Bowker (ed.) *Sacred Place* (London and New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 47.

²²⁴ Meyer, Birgit, and Marleen De Witte, 'Heritage and the Sacred: Introduction' in *Material Religion* 9, no. 3 (2013), pp. 274-280

of signage as a mark that it was, perhaps, not on the prescribed 'route'). Martin Stringer, who suggests that a focus on animism and unsystematic, situational belief statements as a means of 'coping' is the most accurate representation of religion 'on the ground', might draw our attention further still: to the St. Oran's Chapel burial ground. He writes that as graveyards are 'saturated' with 'stories and memories of people, both the living and the dead', they can be seen as sacred spaces where the 'non-Empirical other' is present²²⁵.

If we try to pinpoint the sacred according to the community that inhabits it and their perceptions, we are left with a picture of different groups interweaving through the same space, often at the same time. The Iona Community's pilgrimage (offered each Tuesday, starting at ten and noon) around the island is open to all visitors. It leaves from the base of one of the High Crosses, and a HES staff member begins their own guided tour at the same location not long after. On one of my observation days, the ferry brought its usual group of visitors but also two decorated wedding cars, a bride in her wedding dress, a groom in his tuxedo and guests dressed in soft silks and formals - a striking contrast to the curious visitors in waterproofs. The set-up for the wedding ceremony was done by members of the wedding party and the staff of HES. The guests were visitors to Iona and neither the bride nor the groom live or have lived on the island. The Abbey was open to visitors throughout, but because of the ceremony inside the Abbey church, the admission fee was excused. Visitors were permitted - nominally - to be inside the church at the time. In the space of one hour, the Abbey hosted paying visitors, non-paying visitors,

²²⁵ Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography*, p. 55.

pilgrims, wedding guests, and one doctoral researcher. What happens to the **‘sacred’** in these instances?

A Situational category

Jonathan Z. Smith holds that 'religion' *sui generis* does not exist, and the category 'sacred' is a concept created for use. Smith writes: 'there is nothing that is inherently or essentially clean or unclean, sacred or profane. There are situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed.'²²⁶

'Sacredness', in this formulation, is not a permanent attribute affixed to territory.

It is relational (like ‘religious’, or ‘tourist’), situational, and it is constructed. For Smith, people construct their own worlds of meaning. Smith sees this process of meaning-construction in the creation of concrete entities: the creation of place **from space. He sees religion as a kind of ‘map-making’ where the map represents a** part of the territory (even if it is taken to represent the whole of the territory).

This is helpful for two reasons: in suggesting sacredness is not a permanent fixture of place, but that it is constructed through application. And second, the construction of places as **‘sacred’, ‘religious’ and so on are a kind of mapping,** resulting in construction of territory. In this, he might be read alongside Kim Knott, who has written against the idea that spaces are 'empty' and has posited spaces as dynamic and relational.²²⁷ By writing that **‘social relationships exist in and through space, and the spatial is socially constituted’**,²²⁸ she sees them as sites of contestation and negotiation.

²²⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Map is Not Territory' in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Leiden : E.J. Brill, 1978).

²²⁷ Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox, 2005).

²²⁸ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, p.21.

* * * *



Figure 4.4 | Gate to Iona Abbey

There are three gates to the Iona Abbey grounds. A fee-paying visitor to the Abbey **must use the ‘top’ gate that branches off from the main road. This is the gate that is most clearly signed-posted.** It leads the visitor through the glass building of the HES ticketing office and then into the Abbey grounds. A second gate further along the main road is unmanned and unlocked, with a small sign indicating that Abbey visitors cannot use it. It is most often used by Iona Community staff and volunteers. Finally, there is the bottom gate that leads to the back of the Abbey grounds and then, through a rough and muddy path that runs through a working croft, to the village street. This gate is most often used by islanders, by the Iona Community, by

guests who stay in Bishop's House, and visitors 'in-the-know', who are aware that the unmanned gate offers a quick short-cut across Abbey grounds. At a meeting of Iona's Community Council on a cold, rainy evening in June in the village library, the matter is brought up: should there be locks on the bottom gate of the Iona Abbey grounds? The room is abuzz with angry murmurs, shakes of head, and there are three hands in the air. 'It is an outrage', an islander says, 'that this is even up for discussion.'

While the Abbey is primarily under the care of HES and the Iona Community, and while 'living church' and 'historic monument' are the more prominent ways in which the Abbey is interpreted, there are other crucial linkages between Iona Abbey and the wider island. The Catholic House of Prayer holds Sunday mass in the Michael Chapel within the Abbey grounds in the summer, certain retreat weeks in the Findhorn Foundation house involve a session held in the gardens of the Iona Abbey and the Iona Community's 'jumble sale', held towards the end of the tourist season, is a popular island-wide event. The Abbey, in other words, is embedded in the local heritage and contemporary life of Iona: it is 'monument', and 'living church' but it is also a local site. St. Oran's graveyard, neighbouring the Abbey, was the traditional burial ground for residents, and many who live on the island have family members buried there. Local families have been married in the Abbey, ceremonies are usually followed by a reception or a ceilidh in the village hall. There are occasional concerts in the premises and children in the primary school conduct special guided tours of the Abbey for some visiting groups. Towards the end of my stay, a choir comprising children from primary schools in Mull and on Iona performed in the Abbey to a crowd that comprised visitors but also island residents: parents, grandparents, people

from neighbouring islands. To residents of Iona, the Abbey might function as St. Giles Cathedral functions in Edinburgh - a popular spot, perhaps the site of an annual family visit, a place to direct visiting friends and family to. This leaves us with a place that is simultaneously: a monument, a heritage site, a church, a home, a local landmark.

The multiple uses to which the Abbey is put, and the different groups that use the space, are reflected in its gates and how they are used. Framed simplistically, if **the 'main gate' issues the reminder that the Abbey is a tourist site, the second top gate** (usually used by the Iona Community) signals its use as a home to some employees and volunteers of the Iona Community who live there for a few months or even years at a time, and the bottom gate preserves its importance to islanders **and other 'insiders' who know it to be a short-cut**. This - the bottom gate - is the one that the headquarters of HES were proposing be locked. The site manager of **the Abbey, an island resident herself, conveyed the reasoning from HES'** Headquarters: by blocking access through gates other than the designated ticketing zone, HES can eliminate the persistent problem of non-fee paying visitors: people who use the bottom gate as a way of entering the grounds unnoticed, and avoid paying the seven pound ticket cost. The locking of the Abbey gates, on the surface, seemed to be a step that restricted, or made more inconvenient, the access of visitors and islanders to the Abbey grounds. But it reflects a wider problem: of making a shared resource exclusive, of marking territory through the process of **'setting apart'**. One visitor, after expressing their dismay at the idea, continued with a **memory of an Iona Community's annual Community Week when there were 'tents pitched up in the [Abbey] grounds and there was a great atmosphere. I wasn't**

a member of the Iona Community but I still felt involved, it wasn't this exclusionary *you can get in and you can't* business. It was something for the whole island.' Clearly, to this respondent, 'the whole island' included residents, staff, visitors to the Iona Community centres as well as - and this is the category the visitor himself was in - visitors otherwise unconnected with the Abbey. What he was responding to, therefore, was the 'setting apart' of a space which was previously connected to 'the whole island'. In this way, we can see that making the ticketing booth the main 'point of entry' to the Abbey can lend to the Abbey being reframed as a ticketed visitor attraction and only that. The controversy over the locking gates then suggests a wider problem of enclosing Iona Abbey as a site of meaning: of the prioritisation of Iona as a place of 'religion and tourism' above all else.

Mairi MacArthur, who has done pioneering work on the local history of Iona comments on the tension that is apparent in Iona's representation. She writes that, partly as a result of Iona's fame as a Christian, historic, Romantic site, the study of its 'secular history' has been largely neglected. She notes the 'the erroneous belief that no-one has ever lived there, outside of the former monastic orders and the modern Iona Community founded in 1938', and that this persists to this day²²⁹. This is, for her, a larger problem of Iona's vaunted external reputation obscuring other narratives, particular local narratives, of the island. She writes, for instance, of the wilful erasing of local history in the Romantic writings of Iona by those such as Boswell and Johnson: that the Romantic picture of Iona and its 'ruins' left no room for its destitute, shabbily-dressed local population.²³⁰ Arguing that 'it is [the]

²²⁹ MacArthur, 'The Island of Iona', p. 5.

²³⁰ MacArthur, 'Iona or Blasted Heaths and Hills: the Highlands and Islands through Travellers' Eyes' in *Scottish Affairs* 3 (1993).

community [of the inhabitants of Iona's crofts, farms and village] and their link to the land they have worked that - far from being incidental - has provided the fundamental and enduring strand in the history of the island,'²³¹ MacArthur directs her own work on the social, economic and artistic history of Iona to redressing this balance. This is, more importantly, not simply her concern: the Iona Heritage centre **was set up in a move to making Iona's local history more visible and prominent. And against Samuel Johnson's remark about the 'ruins of Iona', we might read this declaration on the website for Iona that is run by Iona's islanders: 'Iona may be rich in history but it is certainly not a museum and definitely not a 'ruin'!**²³²

This should alert us to one of the challenges faced in Iona in particular: where the multiplicity of available narratives, and the relative visibility of some over others, creates a site of complexity and tension. For this project in particular, the danger of viewing a place that is, in practice, composite and complex, as simply a place of **'religion and tourism'** is the perpetuating of asymmetry and, more seriously, a misunderstanding of multivalence. Crucially, this problem applies to the island at large. With a five-minute walking radius in Iona's glebe (a term for the area of land within an ecclesiastical parish attached to the parish priest) is the Parish Church, where services are held every Sunday and which is the church-of-choice for the church-goers within Iona's resident population (between fifteen and twenty island residents). The Parish church shares the plot with the Manse, owned by the Parish church, too. Sharing the ground floor of the manse are Iona's Heritage Centre - set up through an island initiative in 1990. The Heritage Centre has an accompanying giftshop which visitors must go through in order to reach the room with permanent

²³¹ MacArthur, *Iona*, p. 213.

²³² Isle of Iona website: <http://www.welcometoiona.com/> [Last Access: 21.10.2014]

exhibitions, and a range of folders and informational material about local island life. A ticket to enter it costs 2 pounds. Accessible through another entrance of the **same building is the island's only stand-alone café** (once called the Tea Room and, before that, the MacInnes Room). Both the café and the Heritage Centre are leases from the Parish church, but the revenue they earn stays with each centre respectively. On the first floor of the Manse, there is a small flat attached to the building for use by the Minister when he visits Iona - an apartment which, at the time, was occupied by an island resident; at the back of the garden plot in which the Manse is located are a bothy - a Scottish term for a small hut or cottage - and a shed. These are used variously for storing goods and café supplies and, at points, have also been inhabited by café staff (including myself).



Figure 4.5 | Iona Manse Properties

From top left: Exterior view of Heritage Centre and Cafe; Interior view of Heritage Centre; Interior of Parish Church; Interior of Cafe

A similar study of multivalence can be conducted on **Iona's village hall**. The hall is **in some ways the 'local' heart of the island** - where islanders attend yoga classes, where pre-schoolers have their playgroups, where school concerts and theatre performances are hosted. The hall is not a tourist destination - it is unmarked, kept locked and it does not fall within the itinerary of the day tripper. And yet, it is part of the visitor framework of Iona. Every Monday evening, the village hall is the site **of the Iona Community's ceilidh**. During the music festival, the village hall is *the* primary destination for visitors. It is the site of jumbles sales, discos, drum circles and karmic healing workshops - attended by visitors, islanders and seasonal staff alike. As a place, the village hall is historic, local and visited.



Figure 4.6 | Village Hall

From top left: Golf Disco; Drum Circle; Village Hall exterior; Performance by An Tobar Theatre Company

This takes us back to where we started: the fundamental problem of applying academic categories to study lived-upon and complex places. The Abbey is multivalent and messy; clear divisions - the sacred, the religious, the touristic - are not simply difficult, they are obstructive - holding back what should be a far-reaching enquiry. How can we begin to understand the complexity of places like **this, let alone study them? Taken together with the already shaky ground of ‘religion and tourism’ that we explored and the contests over the term ‘sacredness’, this presents two clear challenges: of the (general) academic problem of applying categories to the ground and of the (site-specific) problem of the multivalence of Iona, and the inadequacy of the ‘religion and tourism’ framework to account for it. If Iona’s complexity is to be accounted for and its range of ‘sites’, visitors and interpretations analysed in their fullness, then we need different constituent terms and a framework that is more versatile, more inclusive and more accessible.**

* * * *

The ‘special’ as a solution

Writing from within a department of Religious Studies, Ann Taves re-states an old problem: the lack of agreement among scholars as to the definition of religion²³³. She notes three parallel problems - first the difficulty of defining the terms **‘religion’, ‘spirituality’ and other constituent terms within the field; second, the**

²³³ **The following account of Taves’ work on specialness has been synthesised using her work in *Religious Experience Reconsidered* (especially pp. 26- 45); ‘Experience as site of contested meaning and value: The attributional dog and its special tail’ in *Religion* 40:4 (2010), pp. 317-323; and ‘Building Blocks of Sacralities: A New Basis for Comparison across Cultures and Religions’ in R.F. Paloutzian and C. L. Park, *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013), pp. 138 - 164.**

difficulty of then translating this academic understanding of the term - a **'second order concept'** - to an accessible, more generic language - a **'first order concept'**; third, the possibility that a search for clear-cut definitions will hold back more valuable enquiries- **in Taves' case, the study of experiences deemed religious**²³⁴.

She writes,

'When we use abstractions, such as "religion" or "spirituality," as our point of analogy, we run into difficulties translating the concepts across cultures and then either give up the attempt or artificially stabilize our object of study. Rather than attempt to characterize the abstract nouns religion or spirituality, some theorists- this author included- have argued for a building block approach that conceives of religions and spiritualities as disparate wholes made up of parts, such as beliefs and practices.'²³⁵

As this extract suggest, Taves suggests that instead of looking for a definition of religion, we can consider it **'as an abstraction that many use to allude to webs of overlapping concepts that vary from language to language and culture to culture.'**²³⁶

There are two aspects of this to tease out. First, Taves' understanding that religion is not a *sui generis*, ontological reality but, in her own words, an **'abstraction'** that is culturally constructed. In this regard, she refers in another work to Maurice Bloch who says **'religion'** is not naturally occurring but is instead a cultural concept, generating much difficulty with defining it. This is underlined by Taves' use of the term **'ascription'** to describe the relationship that people make with **'religion'**: things are not **'religious'** in themselves, they are deemed as **'religious'** by people through a process of ascription. The second aspect to Taves' understanding of

²³⁴ Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

²³⁵ Ann Taves, **'Building Blocks of Sacralities: A New Basis for Comparison across Cultures and Religions'** in R.F. Paloutzian and C. L. Park (eds.), *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York: Guilford Press, 2013), p. 139.

²³⁶ Taves, *Religious Experience*, P. 165.

religion is as a complex ‘web of overlapping concepts’: not as a single, static entity but as ‘composite formations premised on a set of two or more interlocking ascriptions’.

With this in mind, Taves sets out to conceptualise a suitable ‘building block’ which can help to study this ‘web’ surrounding religion. Here, she uses the work of Durkheim on the elementary forms of religion, specifically his understanding that a religion was ‘a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, *that is to say, things set apart and forbidden*’²³⁷ [emphasis mine]. Durkheim saw the sacred, first, as a fundamental ‘building block’ of religions and second, as part of a duality between sacred things - things set apart - and profane things - the things from which the sacred must be set apart. In this way, he saw both the sacred and the profane as essential in the construction of a religious system, with a religion requiring ‘a certain number of sacred things [to] sustain relations of co-ordination or subordination with each other in such a way as to form a system having a certain unity.’²³⁸

Taves, like Durkheim, preserves the importance of a process of ‘setting apart’ in the building of religion, but theorises the ‘building block’ itself as the ‘special’ or ‘special things’. Put simply: whereas Durkheim sees the ‘sacred’ as the essential component for religions, Taves sees the ‘special’. She clarifies, however, that this

²³⁷ E. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955, p.62. The full definition is ‘religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, *that is to say, things set apart and forbidden*’ -- beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who *adhere to them*’.

²³⁸ Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 56.

is not a straight substitution, noting that her intention is not to replace the sacred, **but rather to work with an understanding of the ‘non-ordinary’**²³⁹. (She notes, for instance, that the **‘right to choose’** is an example of something which, in emic understandings, can be seen as special but not sacred.)²⁴⁰ In using Durkheim’s principle idea but modifying the ‘building block’, Taves presents a creative reworking of Durkheim’s theory. She outlines a process by which things are deemed special by being ‘set apart and protected with taboos’, in a phrasing that resembles that of Durkheim. These ascriptions of specialness, then, can make more complex formations - **such as religions and spirituality which she sees as ‘composite formations premised on a set of two or more interlocking ascriptions.’**²⁴¹ This is what Taves calls a composite ascription: where various simple ascriptions of specialness come together, along with the formulation of a ‘path’ with which the special can be reached. This, then, is Taves’ second debt to Durkheim: in emphasising the importance of the collective through the notion that composite ascriptions require the achievement of wider agreement within a group: a process of legitimation, in other words. This **‘high level of consensus’ helps in the** attribution of specialness to religions or spiritualities and, in addition, it helps to valorise group experience over subjective experience²⁴². **Taves’ broader research is** an attempt to cross the humanities-science divide. **Viewing specialness as a ‘deeply rooted human characteristic’,**²⁴³ she considers whether or not the tendency to mark things out as special is biological, and how cognitive science approaches might help **to map out the various ‘paths’ to specialness. In this way, she aims to use the**

²³⁹ Taves, ‘Building Blocks’, pp. 140 -150.

²⁴⁰ Ann Taves, ‘Experience’, p. 320.

²⁴¹ Taves, *Religious Experience*, p. 164.

²⁴² Taves, *Religious Experience*, p. 55.

²⁴³ Taves, *Religious Experience*, p. 34

category of experience as a suitable entry-point into studying wider processes of deeming.

Before leaving for fieldwork, and in trying to set up a clear theoretical basis for this study - which was at the time of conception **to be on the 'everyday' on Iona** - I **consulted Taves' work** on the category of the special. It was one among many theoretical frameworks I carried with me to the field, having been warned previously that many of our theories break down in the messy arena of the fieldwork site. I found this to be true for several theoretical positions - not the least the binary **between 'tourism' and 'religion'** that this thesis was fundamentally working with - but with Taves, the island threw up an entirely new response. Her analytical **category that she framed as part of a predictive model for the study of 'religion'** was, on the island of Iona, consistently used but as a descriptive category. In fact, that word has often been used in relation to the island and in how it is portrayed. Historic Environment Scotland, who administer Iona Abbey as a heritage site mention the 'special atmosphere of the tiny island' on their website; travel guides frequently use the word to describe the island. *'Why is Iona so special?'* a Warden of Iona **Abbey asked at a discussion group of the Iona Community's Prayer Circle.** During my four-month long fieldwork on the island, the word came up regularly, often unprompted, by a wide range of visitors, some volunteering that they thought it **'special for' something, or 'special to' them, or simply a 'special' place.**

Using Taves on Iona: the softening of binaries

Taves notes that there are certain behaviours that signal the ascription of **specialness to a thing (this is Durkheim's idea of 'taboos'):** prohibitions against trading or mixing for instance, or the view that something is incomparable entirely. Likewise, she suggests that there are categories of things more likely to be seen as **special than others: things that are 'ideal-typical or 'anomalous'**.²⁴⁴ In this regard, the setting of Iona as an island and the association of islands with singularity²⁴⁵ made for an interesting coincidence, the implications of which will be taken up in the conclusion. More particularly, Taves suggests that the degree to which a thing is set-apart and how, indicates how special that thing is. This is specialness plotted **along a sliding scale: from 'ordinary to the singular to the really special'**. In this way, harsh interdictions or taboos may indicate that an object (or a place, or a person, or a story) is more special than one which is less 'protected'.²⁴⁶ In her analysis, therefore, she softens **Durkheim's strict binary of the sacred and profane** and can also be used to study places and things across the religious-secular divide.²⁴⁷

Consider these two formulations of the term, both from visitor accounts:

'People think of the Abbey when they go to Iona. The hall... that's where I feel like a lot of my connection with Iona kind of comes from. It was very special to kind of see it again in a different light the other night. My daughter and her cousin dancing away in the front, having the time of her life. Having gone through these life stages in that hall to then have that feeling of being there as a dad was really, really special.'

Respondent | Rob

²⁴⁴ Taves, *Religious Experience*, pp. 34-38.

²⁴⁵ Shannon Marie Butler, *Travel Narratives in Dialogue: Contesting Representations of Nineteenth Century Peru* (Peter Lang: New York, 2008), p. 5-6

²⁴⁶ Taves, *Religious Experience*, pp. 29-44.

²⁴⁷ Taves, 'Experience', p. 321.



Figure 4.7 | Respondent Photograph: 'Rob'

Impromptu outdoor 'gig' by Harry Bird and the Rubber Wellies, Iona Music Festival 2015

'We paid admission at the abbey. And we walked through the abbey. Even though, in some ways, that felt like a bit of tourist experience, um, I felt something very very very special about the abbey. And even though I wasn't, at that time, a Christian.'

Respondent | Norah



Figure 4.8 | Respondent Photograph: 'Norah'

Martyr's Bay Beach

Rob has visited Iona every year for over thirty years. **Here, he notes that Iona's specialness is, for him, part of a long-standing association: his connection, and that of his family's to the island.** He says that the village hall was the site of many formative experiences for him: where he played football, where he had his first kiss, his first time drinking alcohol, where his family members have had their wedding receptions. For him, what is special is to watch his young daughter dance **at Iona's second music festival, and to see its role** in a longer, familial legacy. Norah is on a week-long retreat with the Findhorn foundation: an eco-spiritual Foundation with a retreat house on Iona. She made her first visit to Iona several years ago, with her (then) husband and their young daughter. She is in her fifties now, visiting Iona for the third time, and is considering buying a crucifix. For her, the special is a **'particular feel' that she gets from the Abbey, which she mentions as 'the centre of the world' for her.**

Here, Taves' understanding of specialness allows us to work with two different narratives without **assuming differences of 'pilgrim' and 'tourist', 'sacred' and 'profane', 'religious' and 'secular'.** We certainly see the **'deeming' of each places as special.** We can even see the process by which specialness is ascribed in each case: the attempt to set these places apart in other words - from other places, or **qualities, through 'taboos' and 'restrictions'.** The ticket at the Abbey may be seen as a **barrier marking it off as 'special'.** The village hall is unmarked by signs and locked, setting it apart from the tourist itinerary. Using **'specialness' as a bridge** allows us to compare two seemingly different places: the Abbey, the place where **'religion' on Iona is most located in visitor narratives,** but also the village hall. **Unencumbered by conceptions of what is 'sacred' and 'profane',** and by way of correcting the asymmetry of narratives noted earlier, we can distribute the

attribute ‘specialness’ across Iona and its various places. In this way, it can look at the different aspects of Iona’s reputation considered in the previous chapter - historic, scenic, spiritual, Romantic, Christian - as different threads that each make a claim to the island being ‘special’. The special can account for Iona as a tourist site but it can also account for Iona as a home, as a site of memory, as a tourist destination, as a place of work, as a place of pilgrimage, lending itself to an integrated study.

The generic net

A second important aspect to Taves’ work is the concept of the ‘generic net.’ ‘Special’, she says, not only carries less baggage than say ‘religious’ but it ‘includes much of what people have in mind when they refer to things as “sacred”, “magical”, “spiritual” and/or “religious”’.²⁴⁸ In other words, the relative lightness and elasticity of ‘special’ makes it a useful concept that can catch other ideas and conceptions. This catchment is what she terms a ‘generic net’ and we can use the ‘special’ to effect enquiries into other words caught in the same net (religion, spiritual, holy and so on) because they all share the same building block. Explaining the need for this transition Taves writes,

‘Rather than relying on emically loaded first-order terms, such as “sacred”, “magical”, “spiritual”, “mystical”, or “religious”, scholars of religion can seek ways to translate the disciplinary second-order discourse of “religion”, “religious” and “religions” into broader, more generic terms when designing their research. Instead of stipulating a definition for a key first-order term, such as ‘religious’, and thus defining in advance what exactly will count for us as such, I propose - to borrow a fishing metaphor - that we cast our nets more broadly and then sort through the variety of things that our nets pull in...’²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, p. 27.

²⁴⁹ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*, p. 26.

We can ‘cast this net’ on Iona, to the text below, from a respondent, Cath:

You know, if you bring an expectation or an openness or a desire **then what Iona... the specialness of Iona is that somehow, it enables magic to happen, and I don't mean magic** in a magical sense, but like we were talking about this place you know, the veil between our earthly existence and the supernatural and God and the wonders beyond is much thinner.

Cath has visited Iona over ten times over several years, always staying at the Catholic House of Prayer. Notice **how she moves fluidly between ‘magical’, ‘God’, ‘supernatural’ with relative ease.** The slipperiness of these categories illustrates the larger problem we have identified with Iona Abbey and the island in general: that **the boundaries of ‘heritage’ and the ‘religious’, the ‘historic’ and the ‘local’** seem to be difficult to pin down and define. There is clearly *something* that seems notable about the island - **in Cath's point of view** - but what that *Thing* is exactly, is unclear. However, the way that Cath finds to unite magic, supernatural, touristic, **godly, mysterious, Christian,** is to tie them into one common factor: **‘specialness’.** In this way, we can see how Taves' generic net can be applied to the web of concepts and ascriptions that Cath **spoke about.** In the images below, Taves' framework is to the left; Cath's text - visualised as a ‘word cloud’ is to the right.



Figure 4.9| Comparison: Taves' 'generic net' and that of respondent 'Cath'

On an island where, as we have identified, categories are slippery on-the-ground, the word 'specialness' can capture different categories but absorb them into a more inclusive framework. By dint of its ordinary register 'special' locates emic language - the language of the subjects studied (in this case the visitors) within an academic framework.

A final note

The premise of this thesis, as I have identified, is the agency of the visitor subject. It later orientation around the concept of specialness is an acknowledgment of a curious 'quirk' in the fieldwork process - the coincidence between Taves' term and the understanding of Iona as special. Inevitably, the 'special' on Iona was different to Taves' 'special': it was formulated differently (even if both shared some of the words within the 'generic net') and it had different functions. The fact of the divergence is crucial to explain why this thesis, while gratefully borrowing a word from Taves, does not do much with her theoretical framework.

For one, I am studying specialness as it is constructed by visitors to the island, **placing my research on the ‘humanities and social sciences’ side of the spectrum, as opposed to Taves’ use of the Cognitive Science approach.** The aim of this work is not to **predict why certain things are ‘deemed’ special**, or study if this process of deeming is biologically or cognitively embedded. Instead, I am formulating **‘special’** on Iona as an analytical category, built inductively using the descriptions of the special received from visitors. So, while I **remain indebted to Taves’ work, I do not** share her assumptions and will not be transposing her theory in its entirety onto Iona. Instead, I am to borrow her very useful vocabulary and to see how it develops its own life on Iona. Nonetheless, there are elements of her work that are referred **to consistently in this thesis. The idea of the ‘generic net’ that has been mentioned** here, for instance, is taken up again in Chapter Six where I use respondent data in order to cast an emically-generated **‘net’ of specialness** on Iona. **Likewise, Taves’** observations about the importance of consensus in the deeming of things as special **is taken up in Chapter Eight’s discussion of the ‘working consensus’ of specialness** on Iona. Finally, her reflections on **the categories of ‘ideal’ and ‘anomalous’ things** as well as her argument about the ways in which agency can be deemed to special things, have been taken up in the Conclusion of this thesis.

If the first half of this thesis - which ends here - aimed to drive home the idea that Iona is multivalent and complex, in need of an inclusive and dynamic framework of **study, the second half will put the ‘special’ to work** - studying its application, its conditions, the process by which it is constructed and its limitations - in order to account for this complexity. It will apply each of these threads to the case of Iona,

showing the site-specific value of using the vocabulary of specialness to study this island, and also recommend - in its conclusion - a way in which this malleable framework can be taken to other contexts.

5. Specialness I: Form

The previous **chapter introduced the concept of ‘specialness’ that is the focal point** of this thesis. It clarified that the concept of specialness offers two advantages to **the scholar of ‘religion and tourism’ on Iona. First, that in its versatility, fluidity** and (relative) value-lightness, it can help us consider a broader cluster of terms and concepts that people may use interchangeably: religious, spiritual, magical, powerful and so on. This allows us to not assume rigid distinctions between spheres **(‘religious’ and ‘secular’; ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’)**, and to transition more easily between etic language - the language of the scholar - and emic language - the language of people on-the-ground. Second, that in the specific field-site of Iona, an **attention to ‘specialness’** can also allow us to consider a wider range of narratives about and experiences on the island. In this way, it can act against existing asymmetries in the portrayal of the island. In this chapter, I will address the **particular ‘form’ in which the concept of specialness and its importance becomes** perceptible: the form of the story. This chapter uses respondent data to show the importance of stories in the shaping of visitor imagination. It posits that the fluidity and complexity of specialness on Iona is a function of the fluidity and complexity of the many stories on and about the island. Stories serve several functions for visitors: **they help visitors to ‘map’ the island, they convey a host of images and ideas about Iona, they help visitors to interact with other visitors and, in placing the visitor as story-teller, they allow them to inscribe a ‘place’ for themselves on the island.**

* * * *

Places: the material, the metaphorical



Figure 5.1 | The Machair

In gaelic, the *machair* is a general term for low-lying land, often used for grazing cattle. The photograph above is of the *machair* on Iona: a substantial grassy stretch, ending in an expansive crescent-shaped pebble beach with waters that eventually join the Atlantic Ocean. The *machair* lies on the west side of the island, **approachable by the same narrow strip of road that begins in the island's North End and curves in a rough 'L' shape along the island's length, along the village street,** the shore road and then to the west. The beach that the *machair* is bounded by is called, in Gaelic, *Camus Cuil an t-Saimh*; in English, the Bay at the Back of the Ocean. The *machair* is also part of what is known as the **'West End Common Grazing':** National Trust owned land on which some designated crofters can have their sheep and cattle graze. It is the site for some island homes as well as a resting-point for pilgrimages heading to Columba's Bay. In addition, it functions as an

eighteen-hole golf course. There is no charge for playing on the course and most summer days will see a steady stream of golfers entering and leaving the course. In **the first week in August, the course plays hosts to Iona's Annual Golf Tournament** - organised by and participating in by island residents and visitors alike ('The worst obstacle during the annual Iona Open is a bull, who favours the vegetation on the ninth green', a website tells us²⁵⁰).

As previous chapters have emphasised, on Iona, space is scarce and almost always shared. Chapter four showed how the Abbey grounds are shared between Historic Scotland, who run it as a ticketed 'property', the Iona Community, who reside in it and use the Abbey church for services, and the local island community, for whom it is a central landmark. Likewise, the *machair* is shared by different groups and is the site of a diverse range of events and relationships. At two pm each Tuesday, two groups on different pilgrimage routes convene for tea and flapjacks, while golfers tee off trying to avoid sheep droppings that are scattered around the course. An island family returns from having picked up their children from school, and a group of sun-and-sea bathers walk across the green, on their way back from the beach. The *machair* is beach, home, farm, golf course all at one time and all in one place. **This is what Kim Knott would call 'synchronicity': the fact of places being constructed relationally and through the simultaneity of events**²⁵¹. This synchronicity rests on two things: first, the use of the place by different groups of people; second, the presence of different interpretations of the same place. Both

²⁵⁰ Martyr's Bay Iona website: <http://www.martyrsbayiona.co.uk/iona-activities-and-activity-breaks/iona-golf.html> [Last Access: 13.11.2014]

²⁵¹ Knott, *The Location of Religion*, pp. 21-23

of these things are interlinked: the way in which a place is used affects its interpretation, and the interpretation of a place affects its use.

In his influential work *The Mental and the Material*, Maurice Godelier posits that **‘human beings, in contrast to other social animals do not just live in society, they produce society in order to live.’**²⁵² Godelier argues that human beings have a history because they interact with and transform nature, and sees this participation as a deep interaction between material realities of nature and the mental processes **embedded in social life. ‘An environment always has imaginary aspects’, he writes, ‘for it is** the place where the dead exist, the house of supernatural powers (be they benevolent or malevolent) believed to control the conditions of reproduction of **nature and society.’**²⁵³ Crucially, for Godelier, these ‘imaginary aspects’ are a product of social relations - which is to say that it is human participation that conjures these imaginary aspects. As an illustration, he compares the attitudes that Mbuti pygmies and the Bantu have towards the forest, noting that for the former, the forest represents a hospitable environment as opposed to a hostile and **dangerous place in the latter’s interpretation. This difference in social perception** comes down not just to difference in material realities - the kind of forest space inhabited - but the different imaginative relationships that the two groups have.

If Godelier allows us to see how different uses of the same place can generate different interpretations of it, Rob Shields lets us consider how certain places can also attract a particular clutch of interpretations. So while he also sees places as

²⁵² Maurice Godelier *The Mental and the Material: Thought Economy and Society* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 1.

²⁵³ Godelier, *The Mental*, P. 35.

‘polysemic’ or ‘polyvocal’ - the same place holding different connotations²⁵⁴ - he notes that certain kinds of places tend to provoke certain types of meanings. This is what he refers to as ‘place images’: ‘the various discrete meanings associated with real places or regions regardless of their character in reality.’²⁵⁵ Shields sees the development of place-images as a product of ‘the mediation and intervention of conceptual systems, normative conditioning and socialisation’²⁵⁶. Place-images are what allows us - those viewing or present in the place - to translate these ‘real places’ into culturally-specific symbols (perhaps even stereotypes), laden with meanings of their own²⁵⁷. Working with the illustration of the beach, he writes:

‘Mention “beach” and people immediately tend to think not just of an empirical datum - a sandy area between water and land caused by deposition, longshore drift, and so on - but also of a particular *kind* of place, peopled by individuals acting in a specific manner and engaging in predictable routines. What’s more, these practices (the odd culture of sunbathing, the tradition of sand-castles, and so on) make up a specific ensemble of practices. We learn that bare, carefree and relaxed are not only appropriate but also *natural* attitudes and behaviours for a beach.’

Taking the work of Shields and Godelier together allows us to probe a similar line of enquiry: the key relationship between the material and the metaphorical in the experience of a place. What both are doing is **complicating the ‘reality’ of places**: making us see the value of imaginative production in the experience of a place and, more importantly, urging us to see that the imaginative and the metaphorical can **be ‘real’ too: it can affect behaviour** with a place and affect the relationships

²⁵⁴ Rob Shields, *Places On The Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 23-25.

²⁵⁵ Shields, *Places On The Margin*, p. 60.

²⁵⁶ Shields, *Places On The Margin*, p. 14.

²⁵⁷ Shields, *Places On The Margin*, pp. 47-48.

people make with it. In other words, **what the place ‘really is’ is not a value that** stands outside of the realm of imagination; it is created through multiple uses, the application of metaphor, of interpretation, of imagination. This is where the story comes in.

The storied island

William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, written in the early years of the seventeenth century²⁵⁸, begins with a storm at sea, and a ship full of passengers being wrecked on a small, unnamed island. The place seems hostile, the weather is savage, there is little hope of survival. The action that unfolds is orchestrated to a large part by the magician Prospero, the self-styled ruler of the island. A cast of characters - many unaware of the existence of the other - play out scenes of rebellion, romance, revelry, reconciliation: human drama on a barren island. But the island is not simply the location for the story: it influences its course. Its geography, its ecology, its atmosphere weaves through the human dramas that play out on it to the extent that the play ends with Prospero begging his audience to release him from the island, and from the story it is part of. The fact of the island makes the shipwrecked crew more fearful of receiving help; the fact of the island makes it impossible for **those imprisoned through Prospero’s magic to escape; the fact of the island heightens the passions between Prospero’s daughter Miranda and a prince marooned** on the island - Ferdinand - through the sheer improbability of their meeting; the fact of the island injects a drunken butler and a court jester with delusions of **grandeur, and the dream to rule over it. ‘This will prove a brave kingdom to me’,**²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ It is believed to have been written in 1609-1610 but was first published in the *First Folio* in 1623.

²⁵⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 3.2.139.

Stephano pronounces with unwitting irony to Caliban - one of the two original inhabitants of the island natives in the play - who promptly pledges his service.

The previous section addressed the ready-association between material landscapes and metaphorical meanings. Islands have had a rich history of these ready-associations. While they are geographically set-apart, their physical insularity is bridged by an extensive mythology that has been cultivated for islands-at-large. *The Tempest*, *The Lord of The Flies*, *Treasure Island*, *The Beach*, *Robinson Crusoe* were written about and around islands. The 1973 film *Wickerman* imagines a pagan island society as a site of deviance and exoticism; the television series *Lost* traps a group of strangers on an island, building a sense of intrigue and risk. If **Thomas More's** *Utopia* offers the island as a vision of perfection, **Plato's** *Atlantis* offers the island as an ideal-typical state. As this indicative list suggests, the island has generated a vast repository of cultural and metaphorical stories. Greg Dennings suggests that this is because the island works as a kind of blank canvas upon which stories can be creatively applied and developed. He writes, **almost plaintively: 'There is a bit of** Claude Levi Strauss in all our mythmaking, isn't there? On islands there seems to be a near-magical inventiveness in making Culture, order, out of Nature, chaos, all anew.'²⁶⁰

In a remarkable collection about the representation and history of islands, Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith catalogue some of these invented meanings²⁶¹. In the

²⁶⁰ Greg **Dennings**, 'Afterword' in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation* (Routledge: London and New York, 2003), p. 203.

²⁶¹ Edmond and Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History*.

volume, Gillis writes that while there was a distinct imaginative place given to **islands even before the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the ‘Age of Discovery’** brought about a fundamental shift in what the islands meant. The lush green landscapes which, to the eyes of the explorer, promised fertility and the proliferation of rich biological life, were seen in the eyes of the missionary as Paradise, or the Promised Land²⁶². In a similar vein, Fuller makes the point that the boundedness of the island helped to create an **‘idealised’ and ‘sanitised’ space in which mainland European discourses could be applied and re-worked: ‘a *tabula rasa* upon which they could erect their own story’**²⁶³. Particularly in the realm of tourism, **islands have often been constructed as ideal or extreme ‘types’**. Michael Stausberg **notes the construction of islands as ‘mythic paradises’ in the case of tourism,** pointing to how their separation from the mainland can serve to emphasise their other-worldliness and, by consequence, to exoticise them²⁶⁴. In particular, Stausberg works (albeit briefly) with the idea of islands as Edenesque places to which qualities of simplicity, beauty and serenity can easily be attached. He offers **Bali as an example and points out the ‘soft primitivism’ of seeing islands like Bali or Mauritius or the Maldives as returns to Paradise.** In contrast to the idyllic visions noted by Stausberg, Deirdre Coleman notes the vilification of Bulama (off the coast of Guinea-Bissau) and **Sierra Leone as ‘pestilential’ places**²⁶⁵ that fed into a wider cataloguing of islands as places of disease. Robben Island (in South Africa) and **Hawaii suffered, for instance, from the colonial tradition ‘of imagining islands as**

²⁶² John R. Gillis, ‘Taking history offshore: Atlantic Islands in European minds, 1400 - 1800’ in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation* (Routledge: London and New York, 2003), p. 19

²⁶³ Jenn Fuller, *Dark Paradise: Pacific Islands in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 3-4

²⁶⁴ Stausberg, *Religion and Tourism*, p. 127

²⁶⁵ Deirdre Coleman, ‘Bulama and Seirra Leone: Utopian islands and visionary interiors’ in Edmond and Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History*, p. 79

places of disease and of using them for quarantine’²⁶⁶. Rosalie Schwartz, taking up the case of Cuba, offers us yet another interpretation: that of indulgence and sensuality. She argues that tourism to Cuba is built around images of eroticism and excess, at least partly fuelled by movies, travel books and magazine scribes working in the 1910s and 1920s. **Crediting Cuba’s popularity as a destination as entirely man-made, she writes that the ‘lush tropical foliage, climate, and location were fortunate accidents of nature, but human inventiveness, imagination, and perseverance turned Havana into a naughty Paris of the Western Hemisphere and a luxurious Riviera of the Americas for tourists.’**²⁶⁷

In these interpretations, we can see the versatility of the island as a material and metaphorical unit that has attracted stories of adventure, indulgence, intimacy, simplicity, danger and others besides. Contextualising Iona as an island allows us to place the reputation of the island that we have seen in previous chapters - as holy, historic, scenic, idyllic, mysterious within the wider mythology of island spaces. And in the way that islands have spawned stories over centuries, we have one way of examining Iona as a rich breeding ground for stories.

Iona as storied

Miriam: **I hadn’t realised how flat it is. But it feels a lot bigger. On the map, you feel... it’s a strange place.** There are parts where you can see the other things. It feels like much bigger place. It feels like **there’s more, exploring.**

KB: Which appeals more?

²⁶⁶ Rob Edmond, ‘Abject bodies/Abject sites: leper islands in the high imperial era’ in Edmond and Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History*, p. 133

²⁶⁷ Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, p. 14

Miriam: I like both. I like feeling the size of it. that I could walk and not bump into people. **It's rare, it's rare, but I like the feeling. Get** lost in it, I suppose. But at the same time, I like the intimacy, you sit on a rock and you notice the pattern. Or particular branches too. So you get the big and small. The intimacy and particularity of a place.

KB: **Are there moments when you've felt that intimacy here?**

Miriam: **Yes. Just trying to think... Oh there was an amazing thing that happened! I suppose what's different about this place is ... I had gone to the marble quarry. But I didn't want to come down the** route that the workers are. Because I knew people had come after me. So I went up the rocks and I was in the bracken. And in the middle of there, there was this guy. He had a kilt on and he looked like he'd been here forever. **He was a visitor. He said, are you going to the druid's stone? And I said, no! What are you talking about? And he said it's near a stone near a tree. There was a sheer drop, the waves comes in, it feels far back from the sea and it can't be. He** said you could meditate there. And **I didn't because I thought there** were other people there. But it was wonderful, it was wonderful to discover. There was an oak tree there and it felt like a spiritual place, if that makes sense. **But also, there were birds using it... snail** shells, and bits and bobs.

KB: And that added to it?

Miriam: Yeah, like a connected place. A connection to the past. In the sense that people could have come there many, many times. Sitting in a place and thinking of the people who have lived there before. There are lives that are practically touching yours.

Here, I am speaking with Mirium - a female visitor in her late thirties, travelling to Iona with her mother. Her trip is not entirely voluntary: Mirium's mother wanted to go to the island with her church group and Mirium thought to come along to give her mother some company. They are both staying in Bishop's House - an Episcopal retreat house. It is Mirium's first time to the island. She has told me before in the interview that she was and still is slightly unsure about the place: she is not a Christian herself and feels slightly uneasy with being with a 'Christian' group on a retreat to an island heavily associated with Christianity. But as we proceed in our walk along the village street and then the shore road, Mirium becomes more expressive about the aspects of the island that she does feel more affinity with. The

red rocks on the *machair*, the wilder south-west corner of the island, the experience of meeting an unlikely stranger in a secluded part of the island, the sense of connectedness and awareness.

Miriam and my conversation offers an illustration of the relationship between people and place that we have taken up previously. On the one hand, it demonstrates Godelier's argument on the transformation of place through participation and imagination: **Miriam's perception of Iona changes** as she interacted with it by taking a walk by herself around the island. If Iona feels at once **'strange' and 'intimate' to Mirium, it is because her discovery of the island is not complete**, and her experiences on the island variously introduces her to different possibilities in it. **When she describes the bracken, the tree, the Druid's stone, she is not simply describing 'material' realities, but also identifying and constructing** imaginative worlds surrounding them: a place which she imagines several people as having passed through before, a place she sees as spiritual. But alongside this, we also see the concept of place-images that Rob Shields has proposed at play wherein the island itself commands a certain material and metaphorical meaning. Mirium identifies some these herself: Iona as a place of exploration, of strangeness, of intimacy, of adventure. At times, the place seems miraculous: both familiar as well as exotic, large as well as small, quiet as well as populated. These descriptions at once highlight the **multiple meanings that Mirium draws from the place (Knott's concept of synchronicity)**, the way in which these meanings speak to wider **constructions of the island (Shields' concept of place-images)**, and how they are **meanings constructed through her own participation (Godelier's emphasis on the human production of nature)**. And taken together, they show how material and

metaphorical meanings come together to create a place that is relational, dynamic and above all, *lively*.

Consider, for instance, the **spot at the Druid's rock that Mirium describes**. This is **not simply an inanimate 'surface': it is full of life (the man she met, the various others that she imagines to have been there before, the birds that surrounded it)**. However, the interview excerpt also allows to investigate another aspect: seeing the liveliness of places as not just a function of the various encounters and interactions that play out within them, but as a consequence of their changes in time. **When Mirium describes the place as 'connected' for instance, she is not just** describing its connection to other people and characters that have chanced upon the spot - **she refers explicitly with the 'connection to the past' that she feels there**. **Likewise, her description of 'sitting in a place, thinking about all the people who have lived there before' is** an acknowledgement of the other relationships made within the place, but also an acknowledgement of the long and dynamic history of the place itself. The place she describes seems to carry multiple senses of time: the **time during which Mirium discovered it, the 'connection to the past' that being** present at the place evokes, even the appearance of a man who is both present but **also looks like 'he'd been here forever'**. It is, then, is the intricate relationship between the spatial, the temporal and the imaginative that animates and enlivens Iona for Mirium.

In this, we can turn to geographer **Doreen Massey's potent vision of places** as functions of time which, coincidentally, Kim Knott also utilises in formulating places

as ‘synchronous’.²⁶⁸ Massey insists that we see space as ‘multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming.’²⁶⁹ She uses a reflexive account of her own regular commute between Milton Keynes and London on the train to argue against the idea of space as a collection of different static images where a journey involves the **passenger moving through different ‘timescapes’: the ruins of a Norman castle** visible from the train window, the (apparently) timeless pastoral scene, the view of a modern metropolis. Massey would instead have us see the scene rather differently. She writes,

‘...You are not just travelling through space or across it, you are altering it a little. Space and place emerge through active material practices. Moreover, this movement of yours is not just spatial, it is also temporal. The London you left just a half an hour ago (as you speed through Cheddington) is not the London of now. It has already moved on. Lives have pushed ahead, investments and disinvestments have been made in the City, it has begun to rain quite heavily (they said it would)’; a crucial meeting has broken up acrimoniously; someone has caught a fish in the Grand Union canal. And you are on your way to meet up with a Milton Keynes which is also moving on.’²⁷⁰

At its heart, Massey’s call is to places as relational and dynamic, constructed and in-construction. Moreover, it urges us to see the way in which place-histories contribute to the liveliness of places. If Iona is storied, it is not simply because islands are storied landscapes - it is because of a long process by which stories (real or mythical) have played out on the island. The synchronicity of the *machair* is assured not just because it is used by several people or because it can be interpreted in several ways: it is also a function of the varied histories and characters embedded in it - in *the Bay at the Back of the Ocean*, in the golfing greens, on the benches

²⁶⁸ She acknowledges this debt herself; see Knott, *The Location*, pp. 21-31.

²⁶⁹ Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 59.

²⁷⁰ Massey, *For Space*, p. 119.

that line its boundary wall. In this way, the island-at-large and specific places within it are caught up in stories, too.

Iona's reputation, as set out in Chapter Three, clarified that the island was not seen as being simply **'religious', even though religion is the dominant** association made with Iona. Its wider reputation comprises the Romantic, pastoral, creative, historic sides of the island. We have studied in Chapter Four how these different strands can be read together as claims to specialness. The idea of specialness, in other words, allows us to capture the various strands of Iona and account for how they **interact with each other. In a similar vein, the various stories of Iona's 'specialness' draw from a wider stock of stories of Iona as 'religious', as 'historic', as 'powerful' and so on. Each strand of Iona's reputation has stories that go along with it and that uphold it.** Stories from its Columban past co-exist with the journal entries of Samuel Johnson and James Boswell; the stories of visitors about lost rings, family picnics and dances in the village hall co-exist with legends of Scottish Kings who may be buried in the Churchyard; the same spot on the island has been read as a place where Saint Columba and other monks may have retreated for solitary reflection, a **sacred spot for Druids, and a cattle pen for crofters ('Hermit's Cell'). In this way, a variety of narratives - authorised and unauthorised - abound on the island, interacting with each other. The vision of Iona as a 'thin place' may (allegedly) have originated with George MacLeod, but it has been used and repurposed by other groups on the island, just as the idea of Iona as 'idyllic' can be unpacked to reveal several different layers of its reputation, each supported by a clutch of stories.**

One way to access this embedding of stories within places on Iona is to consider its **rich repository of ‘place names’**. Dennis Kawarada notes the importance of place-naming as an element of story-telling in Hawaii, noting that they functioned as means of showing their affection for the land and given identity to places²⁷¹. In a similar vein, **Iona’s gaelic and English** place-names often capture a moment in time or have a story to accompany them. We have encountered one these in this chapter already - *Camus Cuil an t-Saimh* or the Bay at the Back of the Ocean. In the biography of Saint Columba, Bishop Adomnan explains the history behind two other places on Iona:

There is in Iona a little bay which indents its southern shore, *Port-na-Curraich*, the Bay of the Coracle. It was here that Columba landed. Above on the hill, is a cairn known from time immemorial as the *Carn-cul-re-Erin*, the Cairn of the Back turned to Ireland, marking the spot where the exile found that Ireland was no longer in sight, and that here, at last, he had turned his back on that beloved shore. For as the story goes, in his voyage northward, passing the islands of Islay and Jura, he landed first at Oronsay, went up the hill and found that Erin was still there on the horizon, a blue line on the sea. On again, therefore, in his boat with the faithful twelve. True Irishman as he was, he could not bear to live away from Erin and yet within sight of her, and so, passing the tiny islets which lie off the southern end of Iona, he made straight for the *Port-na-Curraich*, landed there, ascended the rocky hill on his left, gazed south, and saw - the wide **unbroken sea.**²⁷²

Here, we see clearly the way in which stories are embedded within places, and recalled through place-names. Iona has plenty more examples: *Tobar na h'Atose* (*the Well of Eternal Youth*) said to promise eternal youth to anyone who washes

²⁷¹ Dennis Kawarada, *Storied Landscapes: Hawaiian Literature and Place* (Kalamaku Press, Honolulu, 1999), p. 91

²⁷² Adomnan, *The Life of Saint Columba* [trans. Wentworth Huyshe] (London: Routledge and Sons Limited, 1905), pp. xxiii-iv.

their face with the water; *Traigh Bhan Nam Monach* (*The White Strand of the Monks*) commemorating the site of the massacre of 86 monks at the hands of the Vikings; *The Port of the Lad*, *the Hill of Angels*, ***The Gully of Pat's Cow***. In the names of these places, are stories that go with them. In fact, in certain instances, places command multiple names and, with them, competing stories and histories. Consider a raised mound near the west side of the island known variously as Hill of the Angels, *Sithean Mor* (a gaelic term meaning Fairy Hill), *Cnoc Angel* (in Irish).

Wentworth Huyshe, one of the translators of Adamnan's biography of Columba notes that this spot (which he refers to in the Latin as 'Colliculus Angelorum') underwent a change of name from 'fairies hill' to 'angel's hill' with the Christianisation of the island and the emphasis of Christian figures over pagan and folk figures as a result.

Alongside these 'authorised' place names - 'authorised' in the sense that they appear formally on maps of Iona and that they are, at least nominally, recognised by visitors and islanders alike - we have nicknames that visitors have given, too. We have already heard one - from Ben, in chapter three - **'poo valley', to denote the** abundance of sheep droppings in a part of the North End during his geology trip.

From a family whom I met over dinner one evening, I heard: 'banshee-tree' to refer to one of the tall trees near the heritage centre which one of the children in the family was convinced was haunted. For one respondent, the island labelled *Eilean Jura* on maps and frequently referred to as 'storm island' by visitors and island residents alike had a personal nickname: **'rat island... because they can get rats there.'**

This leaves us first, with an understanding of the complex relationships between the material and the metaphorical embedded within places. This relationship is not **'closed' or 'complete': it** is dynamic in the way that places, too, are dynamic.

Places change with time, have histories and stories of their own, attract a range of **‘place-images’ which suggest particular interpretations**. This acts as a cautionary to seeing places as simply surfaces upon which stories are **‘enacted’**. While it may be true that islands were seen in the colonial imagination as **‘tabula rasa’** - blank slates upon which to enact discourses of domination, purity, idealism, exoticism and so on, there is also the fact that these formations today command a rich archive of associated myths and meanings. Iona-the-island is not simply a geographical formation, or a static, material plain: it is populated with metaphors and stories. And this story-ness of Iona with its relationality, interactivity and room for imagination - provides a suitable form for the construction and articulation of the **‘special’**.

Story-telling Specialness

George: **“Some people come to the island and think what’s all the fuss? I’m convinced it’s something, at one level it’s something spiritual... intangible.** Macleod spoke of it being a very thin place.

KB: You get that sense?

George: **Oh very much so... I brought a guy here for the first time and he’d heard a lot about the place. And he said, I’ve travelled the world, what could be so special about this place? And on the first morning, we walked up to the North End and went up Dun I. And [he] just ran up behind me and he had tears in his eyes and he said, I’ve got it. I’ve got it, thank you. I hadn’t said anything in particular, but he had got it, whatever ‘it’ is about this particular island that is so special.**



Figure 5.2 | Respondent Photographs: 'George'

From top left: Iona Abbey; footprint on a beach; White Strand of the Monks; Iona Gallery and Pottery shop

George is a minister in his fifties who has visited Iona several times in the last thirty years. In his youth, he spent some time working in the hotels in the summer - as **many of the 'regulars'** do - and then with the Iona Community. As we walk from one of the hotels - coincidentally his former place of employment - along the shore road to the west road leading to the machair, he tells me about his time on the island, stories, anecdotes, judgements, things he remembers of his time on Iona, people he knew, the ways in which Iona is present in his life, even in his life outside of the island. Through our meeting it strikes me that George is not simply telling me stories about Iona - he is telling me the story of Iona as a special place.

I am using this text to tease out three related observations: first, that George works with several different stories which draw from a variety of sources. Second, that **these stories do not stand as ‘discrete’ units but that they interact with each other.** And third, that the specialness of Iona for George is borne of this interaction **between stories. Let us consider these in more detail. George’s story can be parsed** to reveal several layers: In the first instance, George is sharing an anecdote about a friend of his who visited Iona as part of a larger group. His **friend’s somewhat** revelatory moment during a walk around the island is the central axis around which **George’s narration is constructed. This layer can therefore be isolated as ‘Roger’s story’.** In the second instance, George is not simply telling me a story about Roger, he is re-storying a story that Roger himself experienced during his walk. The **reactions (Roger’s run, the tears in his eyes, his words - ‘I’ve got it’)** we hear are **refracted through George’s own role as story-teller.** This can be seen as a second strand: **George’s story of Roger’s story.**

We can see the third layer in the **mention of the ‘thin place’ in George’s text** which alludes to a MacLeodian conception of Iona that we have looked at previously as **part of Iona’s reputation.** As a minister with some involvement with the Iona Community, this reference indicates **George’s access to** the specific idea of Iona: as a Christian site where the veil between the natural and the supernatural world is **promisingly ‘thin’.** This notion of Iona as a **‘thin place’** was not limited to George. In Chapter Four, we heard from a respondent - Cath - who used the language of **‘thin place’ to describe what she** thought of as the magic of Iona; in Chapter Six, we will meet another respondent - Tara - who relates the attractiveness of Iona to **the notion of it being a ‘thin place’.** Other respondents in this project mentioned it too, even if some were unaware of its origins or quoted a different source for that

idea. **'My friend told me', a respondent said, when bringing up the idea** and a second respondent attributed the saying to Saint Columba himself. The common thread connecting most of the respondents who used this particular vocabulary was their access to Christian and more broadly, spiritual narratives about the island: George had worked in the Abbey, Cath **felt that the Catholic House of Prayer was the 'heart of the island'** and often went to services in the Abbey church, Tara described herself as engaged with Vedic spiritualism and being an occasional reader of spiritual texts about Iona. **This allows to see how the vocabulary of the 'thin place'** has particular purchase in certain stories of Iona, forming a third **layer in George's story.**

Finally, there is a fourth layer of his story, hidden in plain sight in its very first line: **'Some people come to the island and think what's all the fuss?'** Who in this instance, **are the 'some people?'** For George, this group consists of those who, unlike George (and Roger) do not think much of Iona. They form a strand in themselves: the **objectors to Iona's specialness or those indifferent to that narrative.** George acknowledges that this, too, as one of the possible stories of the island: Iona as ordinary, unremarkable, or perhaps even **undeserving of the 'hype'.** These, then, are the four distinct stories of Iona that George is working with: his own, that of his **friend's, the MacLeodian conception of the 'thin place'** and an implied or imagined group - **'some people'** - for whom Iona is not (all that) special. Crucially, all of these four stories **interact with each other. George's own story uses that of Roger's,** and he **uses MacLeod's story to confirm his own.** In this way, **George's account synthesises three stories (George's story of his friend, George's friend's story of having 'got' Iona, MacLeod's idea of the 'thin place')** and these taken together act to challenge the story of Iona as unspecial. We can see this in how this develops: in the beginning, George sets **up the fact that some people do not see the 'fuss'** about

Iona and the rest of his text serves an oblique response to that statement. Using different anecdotes which interact with and confirm each other, George constructs a challenge to one story by emphasising others. In this way, George draws from a variety of interlocuters to argue the case for **Iona's specialness**.

Interactivity and the story

Referring to narratives as an 'artefact', Gregory Currie writes that "narrative-making may proceed by accretion rather than by joint action, as with novels where one person writes a first chapter, passing it to the next in a chain of authors."²⁷³ This 'accretion' is how narratives develop for Currie. This line of argument - the **formation of one story and the storyteller's identity as emerging through an interaction with other stories** - can be usefully applied to Iona. As George's text shows, his sense of the specialness of Iona and their own place within it is **constructed through an interaction with other stories**. The idea of 'joint action' applies readily to George's text, and to visitor accounts of specialness of Iona in general. Consider the quotation from the journal of James Boswell that was referred to in Chapter Three: **'We were now treading that illustrious island, which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions ...'**²⁷⁴. Taken from James Boswell's journal of his tour with Samuel Johnson around Scotland and the islands, the quotation itself is a complex bit of text: a section of reported speech by Boswell, of what his companion, Johnson, said about Iona. What Boswell writes before the quotation itself is,

²⁷³ Gregory Currie, *Narratives and Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Publications, 2010), p. 65.

²⁷⁴ James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* [note: the words spoken are those of Johnson, quoted by Boswell], sourced from F. Marian MacNeill *An Iona Anthology* (Edinburgh: The Albyn Press, 1947), pp. 81-82.

‘When we had landed upon the sacred place, which, as long as I can remember, I had thought on with veneration, Dr Johnson and I cordially embraced. We had long talked of visiting Icolmkill; and, from the lateness of the season, were at times very doubtful whether we should be able to effect our purpose. To have seen it, even alone, would have given me great satisfaction; but the venerable scene was rendered much more pleasing by the company of my great and pious friend, who was no less affected by it than I was; and who has described the impressions it should make on the mind, with such strength of thought, and energy of language, that I shall quote his words, as conveying my own sensations much more forcibly than I am capable of doing’²⁷⁵

Here, Boswell does two things: first, acknowledge the strength of reputation that brought the two men to Iona in the first place and second, demonstrate the role of **his companion in shaping his own thoughts on Iona. Johnson’s descriptions so** impressed Boswell that it is *his words, not Boswell’s own, that are featured in his* journal. As Macarthur notes, both men were influenced by the visit of zoologist Thomas Pennant in 1772 and the work of Martin Martin published in 1703. She writes that Boswell had been gifted Martin Martin’s **diary by his father, and that Johnson’s father, too, had impressed upon Johnson the ‘venerable antiquities’ of Iona**²⁷⁶.

All of this to say that, when the contemporary visitor reads this quotation on the Abbey wall where it is painted, something fascinating occurs: she reads a statement made by a visitor (Johnson), reported and echoed by another visitor (Boswell), both of whom are aware of other stories of the island: by Pennant and Martin Martin, for instance. The process continues: One respondent in this project, Walter, said to me, as I sat down for an interview with him and his partner Bonny, that they had

²⁷⁵ James Boswell, *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson* [note: the words spoken are those of Johnson, quoted by Boswell], in *An Iona Anthology* (Edinburgh: The Albyn Press, 1947), pp. 81-82.

²⁷⁶ MacCarthur, **‘The Island of Iona’ p. 19.**

both visited Iona because Walter had had a long-standing admiration for Boswell (he had noticed the quotation on the wall). He had read **Boswell's** diaries some years ago and had wanted to visit Iona ever since (*'So of course we had to come'*, said Bonny). In this chain of interactivity **is the 'accretion' that Moden and Shuman have identified**. The **contemporary narrative of Iona's specialness should** be seen as at **least partly a production of the 'joint action' of visitors to the island**. The Scottish Colourists who are associated with Iona were visitors - with Henry Cadell hiring a cottage to live in, in the summer months; Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson are frequently listed as famous visitors to the island; the early members of the Iona Community came from Glasgow. **Iona's fame** is, at least in part, a consequence of the chain of interactivity between visitors past and present.

However, there is an important modification to be made, especially in applying **Currie's rather linear process of transferred authorship**. Currie's proposed outline involves someone **'writing a first chapter'** (constructing an internally-closed story of specialness) - **and then 'passing it to the next'** - (transferring a story of specialness to someone else) - **within an established 'chain of authors'** - (where the course through which a story has developed can be traced). However, even in the already intricate text from George that we have analysed, there are invisible **players who are part of the 'joint action' of the construction of specialness**. He begins- *'I brought a guy here for the first time and he'd heard a lot about the place'*. From whom? It might be George himself, but the possibility of other interlocutors is certainly present too. Further, **Walter tells me that it is Boswell's quotation that brought him**. The line, however, is Johnson's. Walter's misapplied authorship echoes that of the many respondents who used the **idea of Iona as a 'thin place'** but credited the idea to other sources, or those who creatively work with stories from

competing, even rival, sources. On account of these reasons, it is less helpful to visualise authors in a line passing along a story of specialness on Iona which they can add to, and more helpful to visualise a loose group of authors interacting with each other through the form of the story.

The importance of orality

Early on in his critical work on narrative, Michael Toolan observes that ‘narratives are everywhere’ and how the human tendency to story-telling means that narratives are present in every sphere of human activity²⁷⁷. When developing his philosophy of stories, Wilhelm Schapp argued that human beings are ‘entangled in stories’: their own and those of other people²⁷⁸. Stories, to Schapp, were the key through which human beings perceive meaning and shape identity. Commenting on the nature and challenges of ethnography and representation, Victor Turner writes that ‘the Anthropologist’s work is deeply involved in what we might call “tales”, “stories”, “folk tales”, “histories”, “gossip” and “informants’ accounts”... [emphasis in the original].’²⁷⁹ Ethnography is necessarily bound up in stories (and herself plays storyteller - an implication I will take up in the conclusion).

To that extent, it is not altogether surprising that orality seem to be important to the everyday life of visitors on Iona. However, in socio-linguistic studies of tourism and studies of tourist places in general, the influence of the written word in the

²⁷⁷ Michael Toolan, *From Narrative, a critical linguistic introduction* (London: Routledge, 1988), ix.

²⁷⁸ Wilhelm Schapp, *Philosophy of Stories/In Geschichten verstrickt*, trans. B. Heymann. (Wiesbaden: Heymann, 1976)

²⁷⁹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), pp. 65-66.

understanding of a place have been instrumental. Rosalie Schwartz's work on Cuba, for example, argued that tourism on Cuba is 'man-made' in that it was produced through cultural forms and supported by policy measures from a variety of sources: travel magazines and travel books among them²⁸⁰. Graham Dann writes on the ways in which the language of guide-books can assert social control in the tourist experience through linguistic proscriptions ('must-sees' and 'must dos' along with more evolved syntactical structures such as 'You should experience the many delights of India' and 'Isn't it time you treated yourself to a holiday?'²⁸¹). However, while travel writing has produced attention; travel speaking has not.

In one way, this is a larger cultural problem of seeing erudition and knowledge as products of the book - it speaks to what has been valued as knowledge. In fact, Richard Bauman identifies a similar problem with the undervaluation of folklore and oral literature within academic departments in general, which are dominated by **'elite, written, Western literary traditions and texts'**²⁸². He goes on to note that:

Anthropologists, for their part, consider oral literature either as raw materials for the linguistic study of unwritten languages or as expressions, reflections, or support mechanisms for cultures and social structures. The social and the vernacular are excluded from the one discipline, the poetic from the other.²⁸³

While stories of a place can be textual - and certainly on Iona they are- crucially, they are also speech acts. And travel speaking is as important both as a concept and

²⁸⁰ Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 80-81.

²⁸¹ Graham Dann, *The Language of Tourism: A Sociolinguistic Perspective* (Wallingford: CAB International, 1996), p. 83/

²⁸² Richard Bauman, *Story, performance and event: Contextual studies of oral narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 1.

²⁸³ Bauman, *Story, performance and event*, p. 2.

as an element of interacting with a place as travel writing. Speaking, conversing, interacting through stories are essential parts of travel²⁸⁴ - and even desirable²⁸⁵ within travel so the disparity on the one hand, of how important speech acts are in travel and their neglect in studying the visitor experience is strange. Visitors trading in stories can become part of the experience of a place. And on Iona, where sociability and connection - Chapter Six will show- are important, speaking is an important element of everyday. In this way, acts of speaking can result in the construction of knowledge, it can be a way to exert possession over places, it can transform the nature of places, and shape how the places are continued to be seen.

This is where the study of the story can have real power. It can, first, undercut the domination of the textual in understanding the ways in which visitor stories are constructed by recognising the presence of other interlocutors in a process of joint account. Second, James Clifford notes that while women may have their own distinct histories of labour migration, pilgrimage and travel, the history of travel has largely been studied using male travellers as surrogates. With his, he raises a **provocative question: 'does a focus on travel inevitably privilege male experiences?'**²⁸⁶ A study of stories as speech acts not only brings the oral experiences of place to the forefront, but also - especially in the case of Iona - creates a more equitable zone for its participants. Finally, the emphasis on specialness as received and constructed through stories - both oral and textual - challenges the notion of the tourist purely as consumer of texts and images. By considering the way in which

²⁸⁴ Alex Norman, *Spiritual Tourism*

²⁸⁵ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*; Julia Harrison, *Being a Tourist*

²⁸⁶ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press: Massachusetts, 1997), pp. 5-6.

visitors interact through stories, we can - as researchers - use these stories to see how concepts - like specialness - are not simply articulated but *constructed*.

The story and place-making



Figure 5.3 | Observation Photograph, *The Duchess' Cross*

KB: This is the cross you were talking about?

Sabine: Yeah.

KB: And so when you came here yesterday, you felt a bit weird?

Sabine: **Yeah. Because it does feel into shape with like... it's a little bit old with, like, nature, houses very apart from each other and then sheeps [sic] and then old stones and there it is. With also grown stuff on it so very old, so it fits. The moment I realised that it's real, into use, then it's different.**

KB: **You wouldn't sit on that bench? There's a bench there.**

Sabine: No, no, definitely not. Then I sit on [the] property of someone or something which is not designed for me to sit on.

KB: So you think, the kind of person you are, you think you don't fit?

Sabine: No.

KB: Okay.

Sabine: Not with the religious part. With the arts thing, a little bit. With the nature, yes. With the sheeps, yes [sic]. But not with the **religious part. With the nunnery, it's okay, because I know it's like still** as it is from old times so you can just visit it as well for your own **imagination, which is nice. But now it's just like you can't have your own imagination about how it should be in earlier days... I don't belong here, I should go out because they have this bond with god I don't believe in. It's very personal, like they're having this bond with it and I'm just there standing...**

KB: But when you came here yesterday, were there other people there?

Sabine: No. Just stories.

We have met Sabine already: in chapter three, during her walk from the village to the North End. Here, Sabine and I are standing **near the Duchess' cross**, pictured above, on the road to the North End. She has just told me that she has not visited the Abbey because it was too expensive, but there seems to be more to the explanation. This is her articulating what it is about the Abbey that keeps her from entering the ground: as an atheist (which she has declared herself to be earlier in the interview), she feels that the Abbey grounds are not for her and for people like her and so she would rather not enter.

I am proposing here that Sabine's reservation is not simply against the Abbey, it is against a particular *story* of the Abbey. We had, in Chapter Four, looked at what these stories of the Abbey are: the Abbey can be read as a religious place, a historic

place, a Romantic ruin, a place of heritage, a local landmark - among others. For Sabine, some of these aspects are more appealing than others. The historic and Romantic aspects, for example, elicit positive reactions from her. The integrated image of stone houses, the fuchsia, the sea behind it, the sheep is, as she states **later in the interview, what she finds 'special'**. She likes the tranquillity of the scene. Sabine speaks at length about the sheep and the fact that they are entirely **consistent and harmonious with the landscape and this concept of 'harmony' provides a clue as to her response to the Abbey and the stone cross**. In Sabine's view, the Abbey and the cross have a place in this scene when viewed as artefacts from the past. The overgrown fuchsia seems to heighten the age of the cross (perhaps Sabine would have been disappointed to hear that, one month later, a group of National Trust volunteers trimmed and pruned the hedges around the cross), making it seem less obviously cared for, less in use. Likewise, the Abbey, when viewed as a place of history (once in use as a church but which is, now, an artefact of a religious past) is entirely harmonious with the picture of the island that Sabine responds to. For her, it is the fact that cross and the Abbey are still in **use that creates the disruption. These structures when framed by 'the past' create pleasing images; but 'in the present' they stand as symbols of Christianity**. They appear to have a living sphere of influence, spreading to places around them: the bench, for example, which shifts from being just a bench to an extended arm of the cross. And because of this spread of influence, Sabine will not sit on this bench just as she will not enter the Abbey grounds.

Importantly, however, this same property of 'live-ness' belongs to the pilgrims described by Sabine. Her decision to stay outside the Abbey gates, for instance, is not simply a response to the Christianity that she associates with the Abbey, but

also the devotion that she associates with Abbey pilgrims. This sentiment was stated by Sabine earlier in her interview, with reference to how odd and out-of-place she feels during the chapel services that she sometimes attends with others at her University. Her uneasiness about being in the Abbey grounds and sitting on the bench near the cross is, therefore, because she sees them as the place of **worshippers who have a strong 'bond with God' in a way that she does not.** These modern-day worshippers are her evidence that Iona Abbey is a **'religious' place, but** where are these worshippers? The photograph above was taken by me, on another observation day - when Sabine and I had gone for our walk, however, there was no **one near the Duchess' cross. No 'pilgrims'** were performing the actions she saw as being related to worship - congregating around the cross, praying, kneeling. In the extract I ask her about if she saw others at the cross yesterday - and she said that she had not. **'Stories', she says instead. The stories of people** worshipping in the Abbey are what invites her to say that her place is not there, not the physical presence of worshippers.

This takes us back to a point made earlier in this chapter: that of the complex relationship between the material and the metaphorical, and the danger of seeing **either as the role preserve of the 'real'.** In her research on travellers, Julia Harrison **writes about the 'mythic quality' of travel ledgers** - books, say, left at places of accommodation where travellers can leave their comments and recommendations. Instead of simply seeing these as way to relay reviews to the providers of hospitality, **Harrison sees travel ledgers as sites for 'conversation between the real and the mythic travellers who pass the same way.'** She provides an example from one of her respondents:

'Often in places we were staying, they would have these large ledgers where people would just write where they'd been...One

young woman was dismissing a guy that she'd obviously ended a relationship with, suggesting that he had some terrible sexually transmitted [disease]. And then at the end she suggests that maybe she's just being spiteful [laughter]. But do you want to take the chance?'²⁸⁷

Harrison uses this to illustrate a conversation between 'mythic traveller' and her respondents: people who, even if they are not present in the same place and at the same time, are nonetheless present in an **on-going conversation**. Harrison's respondent reacts to the mythic travellers in a number of ways: she uses them to obtain information and tips about the place she is travelling to, she responds with curiosity to the characters who passed the same way as her, she laughs at their jokes. Harrison urges us to see this as part of a larger motivation - namely, the want for connection and intimacy that she sees as fundamental to tourism. Moreover, by identifying the ways in which travellers in-the-present interact with and even shape their journey according using mythic travellers, she highlights the power of these mythic travellers in visitor experiences. **Sabine's pilgrims, then, are like Harrison's 'mythic travellers' except that they are not present in written anecdotes found in tourist ledgers but are imaginatively constructed by Sabine in relation to a larger mythology of Iona being a Christian place. The 'stories' of Iona as Christian, holy, powerful, thin that Sabine has come to hear therefore allow her to imagine the cast of characters that comes with them. These mythic travellers are 'real' to her: real in the sense that she 'sees' them even where they are not present and changes her actions and behaviours accordingly: separating herself from where she places them.**

Once, again we are teasing a fascinating relationship between place, stories and specialness insofar as Sabine uses the stories she has heard about Iona to navigate

²⁸⁷ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, pp. 80-81.

its various places and decide the ones that she finds to be special to her. Here, we can turn to Modan and Shuman who argue that **‘many narratives use places strategically, not only as backdrops for events but also as a means for asserting some connections and negating others.’**²⁸⁸ This is what they refer to as **‘orientation’: a process through which ‘the subject builds the place and its reputation and determines their own position.’**²⁸⁹ This gives us an extension of the idea of place as constructed, that we have worked with extensively in the first half of this chapter. Here, we see the construction of place as a strategic tool, used in order to locate oneself. We can see how Sabine constructing the Abbey grounds as Christian might be a way of orienting outside of it, or how, in identifying Iona as **‘special’**, as George was reported to have done earlier in this chapter, he inscribes a place for himself within the island that he does not accord to the people who **don’t ‘get it’**. In Chapter Four, we took up the case of the respondent Rob who placed himself outside of the conventional story of Iona which sees the Abbey as central, and in the village hall instead. Ben, in Chapter Three, placed himself among the rocks in the North End, and deemed that part of the island to be the most significant to him, and the most exciting. In each of these cases, there is a dual process of rejecting some places and orienting oneself in other, more suitable, places. Likewise, in each case, the story is the means through which these self-compositions take place.

²⁸⁸ Gabriella Modan and Amy Shuman, ‘Narratives of Reputation: Layerings of Social and Spatial Identities’ in Deborah Schiffrin, Anna De Fina, and Anastasia Nylund (Eds.), *Telling Stories: Language, Narrative and Social Life* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010), p. 83

²⁸⁹ Modan and Shuman, ‘Narratives of Reputation’, pp. 83-93

On Iona, where there are multiple - and sometimes competing - stories and narratives about the island, this orientation and navigation through stories can be especially significant. In this extract, Sabine identifies three distinct stories of Iona - the artistic Iona, the pastoral and farming Iona and then the religious Iona. Each of these stories has its own symbols and characters: artistic Iona has overgrown fuschia, houses in the vernacular style, and the owners of the various craft shops Sabine has spotted; pastoral Iona has the green fields, the sheep and the crofters responsible for them; religious Iona has the cross, the Abbey and the pilgrims. In **two of these three 'stories', she has a place ('With the arts thing, a little bit. With the nature, yes')** **but she states clearly that does not have a place in 'the religious part'**. Why might this be the case?

Earlier in the interview, Sabine had been asked if she would prefer the ruined Nunnery (which she had identified as a place of interest to her, as we saw in Chapter Three) to be restored. She replies **that she would not 'because then [it would be] already filled in with someone else's imagination all the way, or their history, knowledge. So there's nothing for me to explore... And now I can build it myself'**. This presents an important **contrast to Sabine's comment on the Abbey** where its role as a managed tourist site and its status as a working church means that **'you can't have your own imagination about how it should be'**. Here again we arrive at the interaction between the material and the metaphorical. The Nunnery, as a place in ruins has, literally and figuratively, gaps that Sabine can fill with her imagination. In fact, Tim **Edensor's** work on industrial ruins makes a strikingly similar argument: that the incompleteness of ruins makes them potentially subversive places precisely **because they are outside of 'encoded, regulated space'**. This, for him, is what allows for ruins to be interpreted in a wide variety of ways, and why these places

contain ‘limitless possibilities for encounters with the weird’²⁹⁰. The story of the Nunnery is, unlike the story of Iona Abbey, not presented as closed and certain. The lack of information boards, the lack of signage, seems to present both a Romantic picture of a place-in-ruins and leave things to the imagination. The Abbey, in contrast, comes with a prescribed reading and that acts as a constraint upon **Sabine’s imagination, and encroaches or denies her right** to tell the story. This is why the Nunnery is special to her and the Abbey is not: her sense of the right to creatively construct and **‘build it [the place] herself’ makes the difference.**

This sense - that the right to play story-teller is linked to a close association with place - can also be seen in the words of another respondent, Johanna, telling me why she chose to stay at a particular house on the island - *Cois-Na-Farraige*, the retreat house of the Findhorn Foundation. Sitting on the family pew inside the Parish church - where we had met the previous day - on a quiet Thursday morning, Johanna tells me,

[It’s the] freedom to.. is it to exercise my belief? To be myself.
To be myself. Not being narrowed to Christian belief. To be narrowed and to be able to say, oh yeah, there might be *devas*. There might be stones which have a certain power to it. Druids might have been right and yes, I had experiences in sensing this, that or the other, and I might doubt certain things which are written down in the Bible. **I don’t know... I don’t know.** But for me, *Cois-Na-Farraige* **is the place to stay’.**

In both Johanna’s narration, and in that of Sabine’s, we see the importance of the story in carving out a place for the visitor on Iona on the island and in constructing its specialness. We can see **the relationships between Sabine’s attachment to the**

²⁹⁰ Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, aesthetics and materiality* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005), p. 4.

Nunnery, her noting it as a significant place for her - and the fact that she also sees **in the Nunnery a 'place' for her to play story-teller**. Likewise, for Johanna, *Cois-Na-Farraige* **is the place to stay, the place that she sees as 'fundamental' to her** experience of the island - precisely because it is the place that she associates with a freedom to believe in and to tell different stories. This takes us back to the emphasis that Godeller and Shields placed on the imagination as a way of interacting with places, to Massey and Knott and their emphasis on the liveliness of places and finally, to Taves, and her contention that specialness allows us to bring together a wide of range of concepts such as religion, spirituality, magic and to hold them **together in one 'generic net'**. Johanna's listing of the various stories she would like to be able to tell - stories of *devas*, magical stones, druids, of the Bible - these capture beautifully **the idea of the 'generic net'** and moreover show how the important it is for her to find a *place* in which she can cast this net (so to speak). And on an island like Iona - where many such discourses *do* exist, we can see the importance of orality and story-telling to the visitor as a means of navigating, interpreting and claiming place

* * * *

In this chapter, I have shown how Iona is 'storied' by its visitors, and the close link **between the concept of place and the idea of stories**. It continues a project I had laid at the start of this work: to take seriously the idea of the tourist as an agent and a producer of their own travel. **On the one hand, I have shown that places are animated through stories and that stories acts as rich points of access to places.** This is key to the visitor experience of Iona where visitors can access a vast repository of stories about the Iona and can use them to bring together different

layers of Iona's reputation, navigate the tensions within this multivalent site, and read themselves onto the landscape. The story, then, is a means of articulating, even constructing, the 'specialness' of Iona.

In this way, this chapter sets up a crucial theme in the study of specialness - the relationship between the material and the metaphorical. **This key dynamic is carried forward in the next chapter which studies three specific qualities of Iona named by its visitors as being special- safety, connectedness and a sense of being 'out-of-time'.** It shows how these three qualities emerge out of an interaction between the material and the metaphorical and how they each involve the visitor in their construction. This theme runs through the close of this thesis, culminating in a discussion on how the idea of 'home' on Iona is formulated through a contestation of the material and the metaphorical, and how the concept of specialness allows visitors to enter this contested field. In this way, this chapter speaks to the larger argument in this work by explaining the fluency, vitality - even dramatism - of specialness on Iona.

6. Specialness II: Contents

So far in this thesis, I have argued that the concept of **'specialness'** allows for a more expansive analysis of Iona's contemporary visitors than the framework of **'religion and tourism'** permits. In the previous chapter, I argued that the specialness of Iona is oriented around stories: stories of islands, of Iona, of visitors in the past and the present. For the visitor, stories are a way of bringing together the various **strands in Iona's reputation**. Through the form of the story, visitors navigate the material and metaphorical aspects of Iona and locate their particular narratives of specialness. For the ethnographer, the study of stories restores the importance of orality to travel and clarifies how **specialness is tied up in the visitors' role as story-teller**. From this study of form, we can now move to the study of content. This chapter uses respondent data to ask: what does it mean to say that Iona is special? It uses respondent data to cast a net of terms often caught up in the web of **'specialness' on Iona**: safety, connectedness, the sense of being **'out-of-time'**. It shows how visitors understand these terms, the different meanings they can generate, and the contexts that produce them. Two consistent themes emerge. First, that these qualities are interlinked and often support or shape the other. **Second, they demonstrate that Iona's specialness is both relational and affective** - borne through a two-way interaction between people and place.

Few doors are kept locked on Iona. There are no locks on the doors of the Abbey, nor Saint Oran's chapel, nor the Parish church. Guests of the Iona Community in the Abbey or in the MacLeod Centre do not have room keys. Bed and Breakfasts will usually present visitors with a welcome pack but not always with keys to the property. Self-catered cottages often have doors unlocked, with visitors coming and going through the season. Iona's hostel assigns bunks but gives residents no room cards; the gate leading into the hostel is closed using a simple latch. Iona's houses, too, largely stay unlocked. The morning sees islanders head out to work, the front door pulled behind them for the day. Through the day, the postman goes in to drop off a letter, a neighbour goes in to return something borrowed, a plumber goes in to fix the taps as agreed, an unexpected visitor drops in to see if anyone is home for a chat. If it is Friday or Tuesday, the delivery van from Oban may go in to drop off boxes of vegetables and tins. The day sees many people open and shut the front door, entering and leaving the house. The keys to the door lie on the porch all the while: unused, unheeded.

An observer of these scenes and, sometimes, a participant in them, the visitor to Iona declares: 'Iona is special'.

* * * *

We have worked with the relationship between the material and metaphorical previously in this thesis : **the idea that 'island' can be coded as a place of utopia**²⁹¹, for instance or that overgrown fuschia on a stone cross can be interpreted as a sign

²⁹¹ Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds.), *Islands in History and Representation* Vol. 6 (New York: Psychology Press, 2003), p. 1.

of age and of history (for Sabine, in the previous chapter). In this way, tourism can **work through a clutch of available ‘signs’ and place-images’**, from which the visitor can derive wider meanings. This is what allows the tourist to see, for instance, **two people kissing in Paris and to frame it as ‘timeless romantic Paris’**, or to look at a **small village in England and code it as the authentic and quaint ‘Real Olde England’**²⁹². We took up one such sign in Chapter Four, in the discussion of the controversy over the locking of the bottom gate to the Iona Abbey grounds. I showed that the image of the locked gate represented a larger wrestle over authorised meanings of Iona. By exerting their authority over the bottom gate of Iona Abbey, Historic Environment Scotland were seen to be over-reaching their hold on a **commonly shared asset. Restricting access to the Abbey through the ‘tourist’ gate** represented a restriction of alternative readings of the Abbey: as sanctuary, as local heritage, as an open and welcome place. **In this way, the locked gate was ‘coded’** as an image of exclusion, bureaucracy, exclusivity, commercialisation, power, and attracted largely negative rhetoric from both islanders and tourists.

Compared to the locked gate, the image of the unlocked door presents a fascinating contrast. In the variety of meanings that they represent, and in the way they **construct and are constructed by visitor behaviour and spatial context**, Iona’s doors are an excellent short-hand for the concept of specialness on Iona. **‘I like that things aren’t kept under lock and key, it’s not needed’**; **‘first, I was worried when I heard it [that doors are kept unlocked], then I was, like, ah, I get it, I get it’**; **‘No one locks their doors here, you know?’** These statements reflect the fact that for visitors who did know about the practice of leaving doors unlocked (information that visitors

²⁹² Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 3.

who stay on the island overnight are likely to know or to find out), it was always met with appreciation, if not curiosity. To visitors, the unlocked door was not simply a feature of island life, it *meant* something: trust, community, safety, welcome, simplicity, nostalgia, connectedness, openness, promise, magic, hospitality. For **Iona's visitors**, these unlocked doors represented the tacit safety of a place in which homeowners feel able to trust visitors enough to keep their houses unguarded; the welcome and intimacy of a place with porous boundaries; a lost, Romantic past when community bonds and practices of hospitality were stronger. In this way, the **unlocked door invites meanings that are frequently allied with Iona's specialness: safety, connectedness, and a sense of being 'out-of-time'.**

* * * *

Iona as 'safe'

In the fieldwork data, 'safety' was one of the most prominent and frequently used epithets for Iona by its visitors. The idea that Iona was safe emerged in a wide variety of contexts: parents saying that they feel safe letting their ten-year old children roam around without supervision; a girl in a same-sex relationship commenting that the place feels safe to travel in with her partner; a minister who **sees Iona as a 'safe place' to work through his personal challenges. This term is not conventionally present in the lexicon of terms used to describe Iona. We have seen these in previous chapters: 'beautiful', 'serene', 'holy', 'spiritual', 'religious', 'remote', 'small'. In this web of descriptions, 'safe' does not feature. Its frequent occurrence in visitor narratives was therefore something of a curiosity: not simply to me, but to islanders and seasonal staff as well. At a very preliminary 'sharing' of my data - shortly after my fieldwork was completed - my observation of the prominence of 'safety' in visitor narratives drew reactions of surprise from the**

islanders and staff present (although not, I should add, from the other visitors present). What could safety have to do with visitorship?

Safety in situational context

Tracing the practice of travel as a form of pleasure-seeking, Rosalie Schwartz locates its origins in Industrial Britain, in the model of tourism conceptualised by Thomas Cook²⁹³. **She writes that Cook ‘wanted to take workers away from the stresses of an urban industrial society that he felt fed their penchant for vice and violence’ and that the package tours that he offered fulfilled this specific end. In the fact that ‘Cook fed his excursionists, softened them up with cricket games, and put them in a good mood with music’²⁹⁴**, she sees the origins of a form of travel that was designed to be enjoyable, comfortable and moreover, risk-free. This means **that Cook’s tourists entered into a travel experience specifically designed to be ‘safe’**. By planning itineraries, meals and entertainment for visitors, Cook’s package tours not only shouldered the responsibilities of arranging travel, but also the risks that came with it, creating a way of engaging with places in a safe, structured way. Writing about the Victorian travel context- **within which Cook’s package tours evolved**- Chloe Chard notes that minimalisation of risk came to be seen as an **essential part of tourism, which she states is ‘carefully controlled and delimited travel’²⁹⁵**. While acknowledging that there are some instances in which danger and **risk may provide ‘tourist gratification’**, she argues that **tourism is, by and large, geared towards the avoidance of danger and destabilisation**. Fascinatingly, we can

²⁹³ Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

²⁹⁴ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, xvii.

²⁹⁵ Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt*, p. 213.

see a similar line of argument from Graham Dann with regard to contemporary tourism when he states the standard syntax of tourist marketing work to mediate the unfamiliarity of visitor spots. For Dann, tourist language fills the **‘communication gap between tourist and ‘native’.**²⁹⁶ That is, in potentially destabilising encounters between visitors and the residents of the places they visit, **tourist language can work as a kind of ‘safety’** of its own, and as a safe medium of communication²⁹⁷.

These writers identify the fact that modern travel occurs within a condition of safety. The research on tourism strategies confirms this view, with operational guidelines for tourism and destination management emphasising the need to ensure the safety of visitors²⁹⁸. Debbie Lisle argues that, on a geo-political level, tourism **has to necessarily be deemed ‘safe,’**²⁹⁹ a point indirectly confirmed by Rosalie Schwartz who links the waning popularity of Cuba in the 1970s with the perceived inability of the Cuban state to guarantee the safety of its international tourists. **John Eade writes about London being presented as a ‘safe’ metropolis after the first World War,** specifically noting the example of Soho, which moved from previously **being seen as a place of danger to being regarded as a safe place ‘for tourists to enter and explore’** through the stripping of its associations as a red-light district³⁰⁰. In relation to commercial tourism, therefore, the discourse of safety may be seen

²⁹⁶ Dann, *The Language of Tourism*, p. 15.

²⁹⁷ Dann, *The Language of Tourism*, p. 15.

²⁹⁸ Tourist Safety and Security: Practical Measures for Destinations [WTO, 2006]; VisitEngland: Principles for Developing Destination Plans [2012]; Tourist Development Framework [VisitScotland, 2016],

²⁹⁹ Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³⁰⁰ John Eade, *Placing London: From Imperial Capital to Global City* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. 19 -21.

as good practice. The global framework for security extends to tourist sites - and it extends to Iona, too. But this line of argument leaves us with an interesting contradiction: if safety is good tourist practice, and if contemporary tourism tries to assure, at the very least, the safety of the tourists who visit it - through institutional mechanisms, the promotion of literature, the management of expectations and risk - **then why is 'safety' constitutive of Iona's specialness?** Rather, what is so special about safety, as it is understood on Iona?

* * * *



Figure 6.1 | *Respondent Photograph: 'Darla'*

Darla: I think the one word that I keep using and the others used too - is this is a place where I can come and feel completely safe. Walking anywhere in nature and not worrying about it. No snakes, no wild animals, no wild people. And the light! You can walk all night here, **because it's still light enough. There's no monsters, that's it. There's** not monsters to hinder your safety. And being a female travelling **alone, that's huge.**

KB: **You don't think, having been here now, that there** are some moments, maybe small moments, here on the island, that you do feel **'oh, maybe I'm not safe'?**

Darla: **No. That hasn't crossed my mind... Here, everybody at least says** hi if you say hi to them. **You talk to the people that live here. They're** more than open to talk to you. You talk to people who are touring

here. They're more than able to talk to you. Everybody is on the same island.

This is Darla, a female visitor in her fifties, on her third trip to Iona. Each time, Darla has visited Iona on her own - staying in the house owned by the Findhorn Foundation, on a week-long retreat. Darla is on Iona for a spiritual retreat, and **describes her time on the island as 'self-work'. She clarifies that Iona is an excellent place for this kind of work - it is removed, contains fewer distractions, and she is on her own here. Consider the picture of safety that Darla offers us -people conversing in the street, being able to walk around the island at night, a shared understanding of Iona's specialness. Here, then, we are beginning to step away from safety as a logistical imperative for tourism and towards seeing 'safety' as a cluster of emotional and affective meanings. 'Iona is safe' can then be transformed to read: 'I feel safe on Iona', 'On Iona, I feel safe to...', or 'Iona is safe for me'.**

Bachelard and Tuan would call this 'topophilia' - the idea that humans make affective and emotive ties to their environment³⁰¹. From both writers we get a sense of topophilia as being a relationship of *affect* between a person and their environment; moreover, one of positive affect - the 'space that we love', as Bachelard says. The strong emotional component to Darla's notion of safety shows this topophilia, this sense of affect: not simply in her love for Iona but in the effect that Iona has on her. Being on Iona makes her feel safe, and her sense of safety in turn moulds her perception of the island. Going further, her statements

³⁰¹Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* 1958 Trans. Maria Jolas. (Boston: Beacon, (1994); Yi-Fu Tuan, *'Topophilia: A study of environmental perceptions, attitudes, and values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p.93.

demonstrate not simply that ‘safety’ carries emotional weight, but that it conjures a host of different emotional meanings. There is ‘freedom’, which Darla notes clearly, in the fact that the safety of Iona allows her to walk wherever she likes. There is ‘familiarity’ in the lack of wildness that she identifies on the island. There is ‘protection’ from the ‘monsters’ that might otherwise threaten Darla’s sense of safety. There is ‘camaraderie’ in her note about meeting and greeting other people.

Looking to the wider respondent pool gives more meanings still: ‘security’, echoing a respondent who saw ‘security’ in leaving her backpack unattended on a public bench and not worrying about it because ‘no one steals here’; ‘comfort’, from ease of being in a small place ‘where you know where everything is’. One visitor mentioned her experience of ‘skinny-dipping’ topless on a secluded beach in the west end; a same-sex couple on holiday mentioned the sense of safety in being able to hold hands in public without attracting glances; older visitors saw Iona’s safety in its navigable roads and largely gentle landscape where they could walk without the aid of walking sticks. Much like the cluster of religion, spirituality, magic, and holiness that Taves’ ‘specialness’ seeks to encompass, these respondents’ interpretations of ‘safety’ shows that the term comes with a cluster of its own: comfort, security, freedom, protection. Consequently, the category of ‘safety’ becomes a cumulation of different meanings. Importantly, these ‘meanings’ are not wholly abstract understandings of Iona - they are rooted in particular interactions that visitors have had on the island.

Safety from/Safety to

In an influential work, Isaiah Berlin extends a Kantian distinction between a **negative and a positive sense of ‘liberty’ to the concept of freedom**³⁰². In Berlin’s conceptualisation, freedom can be constructed negatively - **‘freedom from’** - or positively - **‘freedom to’**³⁰³. The former is founded on absence - freedom that comes from the absence of barriers- while the latter requires presence - freedom to practice self-determination or mastery. Adapting Berlin’s scheme to leisure, Victor Turner sees leisure time as associated both with **‘freedom from’** and **‘freedom to’**: permissiveness and license as well as the absence of constraints³⁰⁴. Likewise, Borsay understands leisure as both positive (containing constructive attributes) and negative (involving departures and escapes)³⁰⁵, in a scheme that resembles that of **Berlin’s**. On Iona, I am arguing that using the freedom from/freedom to formulation parallels the **construction of safety: as ‘safety from’ and ‘safety to’**.

We can look back, for example, to Darla’s statement about the safety that she feels from, say, the ‘outside world’ on Iona in her poetic repetition of ‘no snakes, no wild animals, no wild people... no monsters’. Such a declaration works through two common understandings: first, that Iona is ‘set apart’ and second, that it consequently affords safety from the ‘outside’. Looking to the wider respondent pool gives us other such declarations of visitors on Iona being ‘safe from’, variously: distractions, anxieties, responsibilities, dangers, pollution, noise, harassment. We have explored the idea of the island as ‘set apart’ in the previous chapter, exploring

³⁰² Isaiah Berlin, *‘Four Essays on Liberty’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

³⁰³ Berlin, *‘Four Essays,’* p. 119; p. 131.

³⁰⁴ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), p.36.

³⁰⁵ Borsay, *A History of Leisure*, p. 6.

how the geographical separateness of the island creates a suitable site for the framing of stories. Teasing the relationship between **the island's 'set-apart-ness'** and safety, Elizabeth McMahon observes that the vision of Utopia lends itself to the **island because it requires an 'absolute border'** to fend off contamination from the **world outside'** and that **islands, with their boundedness, are able to provide this space**³⁰⁶. This is an interesting provocation because it requires us to consider how **the island's boundedness** works to create two *contrasting* (or - as is a theme in this thesis 'relational') **places**. As Gillian Beer observes, islands may be constructed as **not just separate, but defined against the mainland: 'small' against 'large', 'contaminated' against 'uncontaminated'**³⁰⁷. In this way, the metaphorical and discursive definition of the island accompanies a definition of what lies outside of it; **defining the island defines its 'outside'**. Iona becomes a place of sanctuary from the dangers of the mainland, or an exotic escape from the mundane everyday world, **or even a place of contamination which can be 'sealed' off so as to not infect the real world**.

Importantly, Darla is not simply an observer of these scenes, she is a participant in them: greeting people on the streets, engaging others in conversation, walking around at night. Even during our interview, Darla stopped twice to speak to 'new friends' she had made on the island. The photograph above is her waving to some other people she came to know on Iona from inside the sun lounge of one of the hotels, where we were seated. For Darla, Iona's safety lies in her ability to walk around on it, visit its beaches, collect stones, and speak to other visitors. For her,

³⁰⁶ Elizabeth McMahon, 'The Gilded Cage: From Utopia to Monad in Australia's Island Imaginary' in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (eds.) *Islands in History and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 191.

³⁰⁷ McMahon, 'The Gilded Cage,' p. 197.

the ‘safety from’ aspect of Iona invites or makes possible certain ways of engagement with the island; ‘safety from’ accompanies ‘safety to’. In a similar vein, Euan, a thirty-year old ‘regular’ - describes Iona as a safe place for children because ‘they’re beginning to make friends with local people so it’s kind of a cycle, you know. It doesn’t require supervision- if they run off into a field, you’re not worried about cars and strangers...’. Euan had told me earlier in the interview that he used to run around freely in the *machairs* and play football with island boys his age in his early summers on Iona. This can be used to tease out a fascinating circularity: Iona is seen to be safe because there are no cars and no strangers, and so children can run around without fear, but it is also precisely through the act of running around freely that children - like Euan- come to ‘know’ Iona as safe. Seen in this light, the ability ‘run about in a free way’ becomes both a testament to Iona’s safety but also a way in which to construct knowledge of it.

* * * *

‘Knowing’ Safety

Beth is a respondent in her fifties, and a ‘regular’ to the island. Our interview took place at the North End, where we walked across Calva beach and to the dunes in the far west. The walk lasted an hour and it was clear throughout that Beth knew exactly where she was going - or rather, where we were going. On occasion, we would stop and she would point out something about the place we were at - ‘**this is the place we used to pitch up**’, ‘**that was where I found a big Iona marble**’, ‘**my brother and I used to play hide-and-seek here**’. She took me to the exact spot in which they had bonfires, pointed out a rock on which she used to sit, and walked

the route as though she had walked it a hundred times before (in fact, she probably had).



Figure 6.2 | *Respondent Photographs: 'Beth'*

From top left: a gemstone found that day on the beach; view from the North End; The sea from Calva Beach; An old picnic spot on Calva beach

Through our walk it became evident how intimately Beth knew the place. During our walk, Beth spoke about the abandon with which she ran around in the sands of the North End **when she was a child. She ran without shoes, she said ('It's pointless, you just got them wet...')** and often dived into the sandy dunes along the beach. Her parents left her and her siblings to their own devices, taking the precaution of a whistle which the children wore around their necks and were told to use only in the case of emergencies. The Iona of Beth's childhood had, in her own words, a

‘boundless horizon’ in which she could go anywhere. It was safe to run around in, safe to dive into, safe to get lost in.

In his writing on place, Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that both map-making and navigation **are kinds of ‘spatial competence’**³⁰⁸. They help to produce knowledge, a kind of knowledge which he later relates to **the idea of ‘intimacy’**³⁰⁹: a closeness of engagement. This intimacy can partly be a response to memory, in the fact that **‘memory materialises in the body, in movement’**³¹⁰ and in so doing, **‘it ceases to be pure memory: it is lived in the present.’** Edensor, for instance, argues that walking **around ruins provoke ‘involuntary memories’: memory as created through sensuous and corporeal encounters**³¹¹. In a similar vein, David Crouch attends to the sensuous nature of tourist encounters and argues that tourism is a way of **‘knowing’**³¹². In the **act of tourism, the tourist’s body is a principal vehicle** - determining how the tourist perceives a sight, what they smell, see, touch and so on. The experiences of visitors are also a function of exertions of the body³¹³ and these exertions are instructive in **how visitors ‘know’ place. If the North End is safe for Beth, it is because Beth constructs it as such through her own participation with it.**

Iona’s ‘safety’ is not simply a matter of discovery, but of engagement: in which the visitors feel ‘safe to’ engage with it in particular ways: sunbathing in the nude, or

³⁰⁸ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 78.

³⁰⁹ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 136.

³¹⁰ Ann Game, *Undoing the Social Towards a Deconstructive Sociology* (Milton Keynes : Open University Press, 1991), p. 97.

³¹¹ Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*, p. 151.

³¹² **David Crouch, ‘Surrounded by Place: embodied encounters’** in Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (eds.) *Tourism: Between place and performance* (2002): 207-218, p. 213-214.

³¹³ Game, *Undoing the Social*, p.97.

working through emotional challenges, or walking by themselves at night. In this way, safety describes not simply remote features of place, but as a discursive world produced through visitor engagement. And in the same way that the material can **provoke the metaphorical, the metaphorical can generate material ‘realities’**³¹⁴. Consider, for instance, Darla’s explicit identification as a **‘female travelling alone’**.

Peter Borsay notes that while there are records of women travelling along in the **eighteenth century, too, it was Thomas Cook’s package tours that made it more** widely possible for women to travel unaccompanied³¹⁵, highlighting the relatively late entry of the solo-female-traveller as a common travel demographic than the solo-male-traveller. On Iona, conversations with residents and staff confirmed two **suspensions: that there are two demographic categories for which there are no ‘male’** counterparts, the all-female group (meditation groups, retreat groups, writing groups and so on) and the solo female traveller. In her work Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch applies Michel de Certeau’s understanding of a **‘tactic’** (which he sees as calculated actions)³¹⁶ **to show, how in the case of the ‘Women’s Helsinki Project’,** walking can be a way of reclaiming power within place³¹⁷. Through the act of walking, gendered spaces may be challenged and subverted. In the way that Crouch suggested places are shaped through **the ‘shared possession with other people’,** I am suggesting that **Darla’s sense of being ‘safe from’ the mainland and ‘safe to’** roam helps to construct Iona as a populated and safe place. This allows us to

³¹⁴ Maurice Godelier and Martin Thom. *The Mental and the Material: thought economy and society* (London: Verso, 1986).

³¹⁵ Borsay, *History of Leisure*, p. 118-119.

³¹⁶ Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. xvii, 37.

³¹⁷ Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch, **‘Pedestrian Art: The Tourist Gait as Tactic and Performance’** in *Ethno-logia Europaea* 40:2 (2010): pp. 14-28.

reframe Darla's walk on island roads at night as not simply a means through which she discovers or experiences the safety of Iona, but as a signifier of it. We can see the effects of this in the statement of one respondent, Vayu, commenting on how 'feminine' she finds Iona's energy (an opinion expressed by other respondents too). Vayu wondered if she felt this because nearly all of the people that she had interacted with on her visit to the island were female. 'There are a lot of women here. Once I started seeing it, I couldn't stop.', she said.

* * * *

Iona as 'Connected'

*I am sheltered in a warm house with two respondents, both of whom have been visiting Iona for many years: Niall and Kiera. For this visit, Kiera- **Niall's** friend - is staying as his guest. They have known each other since they were teenagers. Kiera's early vacations on Iona took place in a cluster of tents in the North End of the island whereas Niall's was nearer to the village. The interview proceeds through shared memories: stories that often spill into other stories. There are gaps in their recollections, vehement disagreements ('**we fight about this all the time!**'), teasing and joking. The conversation turns to why it is important for them both to return to Iona.*

Kiera: **When life is hard, difficult, this is a solid base... I think it's about my emotional and my mental state. About the place that I'm in. I come here and this is where fundamental stuff happens. It's not the good stuff or the bad stuff, but it's the important stuff that takes place here. The challenges that I've had in my life, I would always want to connect back to Iona [...]**

Niall: Which is I think, partly I think about childhood security. This is **where I had a good time as a kid, a good time... Sorry, I'm now projecting** to you, explaining your /[overlap]

[overlap]/ Kiera: - No, no, no, go ahead. We know each well enough, **so it's alright**

Niall: -- **but also there's something about this house, where if you leave the window open, you hear the tide going in and out and that's an incredibly soothing thing... I'm not denying the spirituality at all, but there's something about the physicality of the place that is going to make people relax. And that's tide and sun and wind and air... It's not about spirituality, it's about specialness or sacredness or security or something.**

Kiera: **Specialness, hmm... Security not necessarily, it's connectedness.**

At the start of the extract, Kiera is speaking about a place on Iona that is particularly important to her. The spot is on the North End, near where she and her family used **to camp in the summers. This is the place she sees as 'hers', and she and Niall plan to go there the next day, to throw her mother's ashes off it. During challenging** periods, she experiences a desire to return to the island. In each case, she mentions how returning to Iona helped her to work through challenges and to feel, in her own **words, 'okay' ('this is the place I come to, to feel okay').** Hearing from Kiera clarifies the close relationship between connectedness and the previous discussion on safety. For Kiera, her emotional safety on Iona allows her to experience the connectedness she feels on the island, and the sense of connection she experiences **on the island makes it possible for her to be 'okay' here, to be emotionally safe. In this way, Kiera's sense of connectedness is not simply internal, introspective and nor is the 'place' - the rock of the hood of the crow (a small formation in Iona's North End), a blank surface to which she feels an attachment. Instead, it is the interaction between Kiera's own relationship to the island and the memories she has of the island's places that produces the connectedness that she feels to it: in**

the vein that, say, Beth felt on the North End (earlier in this chapter), or Rob to the village hall (Chapter Five).

Like the term ‘safety’, several respondents to Iona specifically mentioned the sense of Iona as a ‘connected place’ while many others referred to it using a clutch of epithets that I have grouped under this broad term. We can see some of these different interpretations even within the excerpt provided. In Niall’s repetition (‘the sun, the sand, the wind, the air’), he looks to the importance of the natural elements in creating a sense of connectedness. This is also what many visitors mean when they speak of connectedness on Iona: the sense of being part of a system that involves the sea, the crofts, the animals in the fields. One respondent, Querida, spoke of feeling supported by elements, and feeling ‘nourished’. She identified as an introvert who usually finds it difficult to speak with groups of people. She noted how, in her position as volunteer in Iona Hostel, that she was able to connect with other people because she felt secure in her own sense of self. She later ascribed this to a feeling of ‘openness’ and ‘connection’ when Iona’s openness to the elements encourages her to be connected in a fuller way to them too. Her own sense of calm, then, comes from feeling connected to the physical and natural island around her. Neither Querida nor Niall consider their own feelings of connectedness as being **spiritual**, but other respondents made the link more readily. Vayu, whom we have met briefly in the previous section, stated that she found the energy of Iona to be supportive of spiritual growth and development. This was her first visit to Iona, on a four-day Buddhist meditative practice, and she noted the feeling of ‘fulfilment’ and ‘nourishment’ she got when listening to the waves and watching the sunsets over Mull. Ulrich, whom we will meet in the next chapter - made a similar point about how the landscape of Iona - with its green fields and

sheep - was deeply contemplative and spoke to a connectedness in the island that he termed **'harmony'**, a word Sabine uses too (Chapter Three).

Already, as with the discussion on safety, a **'cluster'** of words surrounding connectedness is becoming apparent: familiarity, openness, harmony, nurture. Each of these have wider histories within their situational and spatial contexts. Crawshaw and Urry, using the specific case of the Lake District, note how the Romantic imagery of landscape prioritises **'tranquillity, solitude and harmony'**³¹⁸. Julia Harrison uses Csikszentmihalyi's concept of the flow, a holistic sensation that people feel when they act with **'total involvement... a highly focused state of consciousness'**³¹⁹ to explain the sense of connection that her Canadian respondents felt to their surroundings when they travelled. In Ivakhiv's punchy summary of New Age ideas as having to do with **'ecological harmony, personal and planetary integration, and spiritual fulfilment'**, we can trace a link between Vayu's self-described spirituality and her use of the vocabulary of nourishment³²⁰.

Then there is the connectedness demonstrated in the form of the interview itself: the relationship between Kiera and Niall. In the way in which Kiera and Niall interacted with each other and the stories of Iona they had (in common or on their own), in the way in which they took up narrations from each other (the interruption marked on the transcript), or answered for each other (**'Sorry, I'm now projecting**

³¹⁸ Carol Crawshaw and John Urry, **'Tourism and the Photographic Eye'** in *Touring cultures: transformations of travel and theory* (1997): 176-95, p.184-194.

³¹⁹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, **'Play and intrinsic rewards'** in *Journal of humanistic psychology* (1975), p. 36-38.

³²⁰ Adrian Ivakhiv, **'Nature and self in New Age pilgrimage'** in *Culture and Religion* 4, no. 1 (2003): 93-118.

onto you...'), we see the importance of relationality between visitors to the shared understanding of Iona as special. This is connectedness understood as a way of relating to other people: reliant on sociability, companionship and camaraderie. Kiera, for instance, mentions her own family, the other families in the North End who usually visited around the same time (she gives me a rundown: 'there was us, there were the Jacksons, there were the Ropers'), the various people on the island she has grown to know, the friends she has made - Niall included. If Beth's walk in the North End demonstrated an 'intimacy' with the immediate surroundings of Calva Beach, Kiera's list of names demonstrates a different kind of intimacy: of knowing people or knowing 'place' through people.

Connectedness and Intimacy

KB: I was wondering, you said Iona is a special place. What do you mean when you say special?

Richard: Here, when you come, you come to a specific community which is bound by the sea. When the last boat goes back, this is the community. **In the winter, this is the community... A sense of, a bit like being a village** if you like. To become part of it, to know that one has a role and how you **can contribute. And it's as much a part of the island where I live as here.**

A sense of identity, place of being, place of belonging. Strands of that that resonate with me when I come back.

In this above extract, we hear from Richard - a visitor who used to frequent Iona many years ago and who has more recently resumed his regular visits to the island. There was a significant gap between the first flurry of visits for Richard - when he was a child, then a teenager, then in his twenties- and the second period of broadly regular visits - re-started when he was in his fifties. He had not come for several years in the middle: partly because of his having moved home (to an Atlantic island, coincidentally) and partly because of the difficulty with returning to a place that

was, as he tells me later, so **'saturated with the ghosts of relationships past.'** When we walk along the shore road, Richard seems to sense many of these **'ghosts'** in our walk - he tells me of people he knew, points out the original inhabitants of some of the homes we walk past, mentions his old friendships with people on the island. The sense as we walk is of an island rich with characters: groups, people, ghosts.

In her work on the experiences of Canadian tourists, Julia Harrison identifies sociability and connection as a key theme in her data, writing that her respondents **'desired to either** affirm or experience anew some form of human connection across time, space or cultural difference.'³²¹ She relates this to the particularity of the travel encounter which she says brings with it an openness of its own. Travel, for Harrison, brings with it **a 'sociability impulse' and she relates her own respondents'** attitudes to this specific context. Harrison clarifies the precise nature of this desired **'connection' as 'intimacy'.** This notion of intimacy is **clearly visible in Richard's** narration. For Richard, the feeling of specialness comes through not simply in knowing people, but in knowing people in the context of a small island community, bound by the sea and by the comings and going of a ferry. These factors seem to intensify the sense of community that exists here - in the fact that the construction **of the world 'outside' on the mainland seems** to reinforce the safety of Iona. Here, the small-ness of the island and the sense of distance created and reinforced by the passing of the ferries works to reframe sociability - that may exist in other places too - as intimacy. The connectedness of Iona is summed up when Richard described Iona as a place of identity, being and belonging, where everyone knows everyone, and there are clear places and functions for the people within the community. Fascinatingly, then, where does this leave Richard?

³²¹ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 46

If we go back to the excerpt here, **we can pause at its last sentence: ‘strands of that resonate with me when I come back’**. When Richard is speaking to here is not simply the presence of intimacy as an important part of his interactions with Iona, but a certain *loss* of intimacy that has marked his more recent visits. **Richard’s Iona, today, is marked by ‘ghosts’**: a striking image in which we can get a sense of how the *place* of Iona can remain familiar to him owing to his intimate knowledge of the people who lived there, even when the people are no longer present. We have seen **these ‘non-empirical Others’**³²² (to use a term from the Religious Studies lexicon) before. Chapter Five referred to **‘place names’ as a way of imbuing landscapes with stories about characters** - the *Gully of Pat’s Cow*, the *Port of the Lost Lad*, the *Hill of Angels*. It also addressed the importance of **‘mythic travellers’: imagined Others** against whom visitors understood their own position, or with whom they interacted through stories³²³. In the way that place-names embed stories and mythic travellers, **Iona’s hills and homes seem have characters embedded in them** for Richard.

To push this further still: when Richard, then, speaks of the **‘community’ of Iona that is familiar to him, it is not Iona’s current community that he refers to, it is the one he knew when he was younger**. He mentions to me that while he recollects one of a now grown-up islander as a baby, **‘I don’t think he’ll even recognise me now.’** Likewise, when I ask him if he still speaks with some of the people he met frequently on his summer visits to the island, he says that they exchange greetings on the street, and the occasional remark about mutual acquaintances **(‘There’s no**

³²² This is Martin Stringer’s term. Stringer, *Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 32-33.

³²³ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*.

connection’). This allows us to see a layer of nostalgia in **Richard’s** comments about **the community of Iona**. Specifically, it lets us see how Richard’s valorisation of the connectedness of Iona can nonetheless work to place him outside its current community life where he does not quite belong - or does not belong in the same way. Fascinatingly, this takes us back to Harrison who locates the root cause of the **need to do ‘touristic intimacy’ in the ‘uncertainty and heightened awareness’** brought by the process of traveling³²⁴. For Harrison, intimacy is at least partly a **response to the visitor’s own position within the place**. In the case of Richard, then, we can see how the closeness he felt **to Iona’s** community during his youth helped to build the sense of belonging that he feels now. To push it further still, it could even help us hazard a guess: that the loss of closeness and intimacy may also work to unsettle that same sense of belonging. For that, we would need to tease a particular **aspect of Harrison’s theory that she implies but does not clearly state**: that tourist sociability can be a response to *vulnerability*.

Here, I am working with two different conceptualisations of community-relations, drawing from two very different sources: **Anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of *communitas*** and, from the field of Political Science, **Robert Putnam’s work on social capital**. Turner works with the specific case of pilgrimage and posits *communitas* as an experience of fellowship and interrelatedness that exceeds the bounds of social obligation³²⁵. For Turner, liminality - **the state of being ‘between and betwixt’** structures provides the suitable condition for the construction of the feeling of *communitas* and the collective performance of rituals secures the feeling. Here, we **address the fact that Turner sees ‘liminality’ in the project of travel and links this**

³²⁴ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 49.

³²⁵ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

to the production of community feeling among pilgrims. Can we use this to bolster **Harrison's suggestion that visitor vulnerability and uncertainty** produces the need to 'do intimacy'? Interestingly, **Robert Putnam makes a similar point in his work on** the changing (specifically, declining) importance of community in post 1960s America. Writing that as the process of emigration requires leaving behind social connections, those who emigrate seek to respond to the relative insecurity and vulnerability of their position by creating social capital in the places to which they go³²⁶.

Taken together, these perspectives allow us to contextualise why connectedness might be an important concern for visitors to Iona. In the way that tourist guide-books can bridge unfamiliar places, we can now see how sociability and community among visitors can help to bridge the unfamiliarity of the process of travelling by creating new modes of interaction. **Turner's *communitas*** constructs the collective experience of pilgrims through a shared understanding³²⁷. Likewise, Putnam notes **that places that are high in 'social capital' tend to be characterised by trust,** dependability, cooperation - and interestingly, safety.³²⁸ We have seen in the **previous chapter, for instance, that stories are the key to navigating the Iona's** material and metaphorical terrain. But how is it that these stories are shared? They are shared by (among other people) visitors, through their conversations with islanders, other visitors, their own friends. In this way, visitor stories not only help to navigate and interpret the island, but the sharing of those stories help to build the sociability and connectedness that are also important to visitor experience. In

³²⁶ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001).

³²⁷ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*.

³²⁸ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, p.21.

‘connectedness’, therefore, we not only have an important element of the special, we also have an explanation for *why and how the special is perpetuated*. As we saw in the case of Darla in relation to ‘safety’, the visitors who find Iona special because it is connected are themselves co-constructors and participants in this process.

* * * *

‘Out-of-time’

My interview with Beatrice opened with an apology: I’ve forgotten my wristwatch, I said, would you mind keeping an eye on the time? We needed to keep track because both she and I intended to go to the Village Hall later that afternoon, for a drumming workshop to which members of the public were invited. We were not far from the hall: in the restaurant area of one of the island hotels. As cutlery clinked against the plates of diners (it was shortly after rush hour on lunch time) and with waiting staff flurrying past our table carrying trays, taking orders, Beatrice and I spoke about her routines on the island. She has been visiting for about fifteen years, usually for a week; are there routines she tends to follow?

Well, there’s no television. I did buy a paper today but I don’t normally bother to be honest. So I don’t read the paper... In some ways there’s nothing to do. I can’t imagine bringing a friend here and going, there’s nothing to do! Nothing obvious, none of those obvious things to do! But there’s so much to appreciate, if you just, if I just take a moment to appreciate. Even looking out of the bedroom window... the colour of the water is different. And when I look again, it’s different again. And these sort of things. There’s time to appreciate what’s going around, you know... Even just walking along the shore and seeing the waves and the different colours, how that keeps changing. And looking at the pebbles and seeing there’s millions of them and they’re all different. Time to appreciate small things.

This extract makes clear some of the things that Beatrice finds to be special about Iona. She uses the word herself later in the interview, and says that she experiences a particular and powerful feeling of tranquillity and stillness on the island. From the extract, some of the things that Beatrice sees as beautiful are the colour of the water, the details marked on pebbles, the waves in the sea. Moreover, the absence of intrusions such as the television and the paper and of ‘obvious things to do’, imbue this beauty with tranquillity - and the sense of being undisturbed. Moreover, the tranquillity of her surroundings mirrors her own: the undisturbed beauty of the place means that she can ‘take time’ to appreciate it. She does not rush about on Iona, she tells me, taking the time to appreciate where she is: slowly, with care - and this is what she means by ‘stillness’. Beatrice is not alone in mentioning this - visitors often mentioned the qualities of peacefulness, tranquillity, stillness, serenity, quiet on the island, often relating this to how they themselves experience the island. Earlier in this chapter, we had heard from Niall on the comfort of being indoors in his home but being able to hear the sound of the tide in the Sound of Iona. ‘Anyone could fall asleep to that’, he had said. Indeed, peace, serenity, tranquillity (and so on) are often represented in tourist marketing of Iona, often traced to particular features of the island landscape and fauna. They mention, for instance, Iona’s ‘exceptional quality of light and clarity of air’³²⁹, ‘beauty and white sand beaches’³³⁰, and ‘treasury of wildlife and plants, and a deep sense of peace.’³³¹ These understandings of Iona’s peace and tranquillity often foreground aesthetic and sensory features: what the island looks like, what it sounds of, how it feels, the

³²⁹ Scottish Tourist website: <<http://www.scottish-tourist.com/iona-2/>> [Last Access: 28.02.2018].

³³⁰ Isle of Iona website: <<http://www.welcometoiona.com/places-of-interest/>> [Last Access: 28.02.2018].

³³¹ Culture Trip website: <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/scotland/articles/welcome-to-iona-scotlands-hidden-mystic-island/>> [Last Access: 28.02.2018].

various places of significance. However, what is **interesting about Beatrice's** narration is that it gives us an additional way of conceptualising these various **understandings of Iona's beauty and serenity: seeing them as a function of time.**

Beatrice's Iona is, in one sense, full of 'time'. She has time here to do things she wants to do, and this makes it **possible for her to 'appreciate the little things'.** Usually, in the busy town in which she lives, she does not have the time to walk in **nature or to 'just be'; Iona, in contrast, offers her these opportunities.** There is a kind of luxuriousness to her being here: the luxury of being able to stare for ages out the window, or at pebbles on the beach. The luxury, even, of being able to be away from the television or the newspaper. This is in part, to do with the fact that Beatrice is a visitor on holiday and visitorship, as chapter three has shown, often relies on this idea of a departure or escape: from the ordinary and the everyday. However, what we hear from Beatrice helps to illustrate how these departures help to construct the luxurious sense of time she feels. To this end, she says that, while **on the island, she '[makes] a point of saying for once in my life I'm not going to have a list of things I'm going to do. I'm just going to see what happens and see what I feel like, moment to moment. You know, like, meeting you today...'** Beatrice and I had, indeed, met earlier that day: at Mass held by the Catholic House of Prayer each Sunday in the Michael Chapel. She had come up to me after Mass, saying that she recognised me from the photograph in the research note at the jetty. We set up a time for an interview later that day. When we met, Beatrice mentioned how **much she likes these chance encounters ('perhaps even Providence', she states),** and how important these are to her experience of Iona. She values spontaneous meetings while she is here, and links this ability to be spontaneous to the absence of lists and set plans. The escape from lists (and, indeed, the fact that Iona has no

'obvious things to do'), in other words, is why she can luxuriate in time, living 'moment to moment'. Which poses a curious puzzle: that in her 'moment to moment' living, Beatrice's Iona is full of time because it is also *out* of time.

Consider, for instance, a variety of respondent statements about their relationship to time on the island: **'I forget about time when I am here'; 'I have no idea what day it is'; 'Everything is a bit slower here, everything takes a bit longer';** (on the journey to Iona) **'being on the train and then riding on the ferries, it's like actually taking you back into another time';** (on seeing a bench with the words 'be still' engraved), **'That's exactly what Iona is for, I love that'. One respondent, noting that his partner was looking at his wristwatch, said, playfully, 'Oh never mind that, we're on Iona time now.'** Even in these statements, a huge range of ideas around time, and conceptions of time, can be seen: the idea that time on Iona is paced differently, that it is slower and even 'still', or that it is irrelevant entirely. All of these demonstrate departures in some form. Beatrice speaks of a similar kind of escape - not having a television and not (usually) buying a newspaper. This was a particular theme among respondents, who often noted with pleasure that they had not been reading the newspapers or watching the news, or that they had not turned the television on in their rooms during the course of their stay. If we see the newspaper and the television as, in their very function, reminders of what is **'current'** and as media that are embedded in **'the times'**, we can see how escaping from them could also promise an escape from **'current time'**. **'I don't even buy a paper here, I gather some awful thing has happened in Tunisia, but it's nice to take that time and not to bother with the news', one respondent told me, signalling that while she was, of course, aware that 'time' moved on elsewhere in the world, that being on Iona afforded her the privilege of being removed from it. This is an**

important reminder that her escape from 'time' also allowed her to experience her own time on Iona differently. These escapes, in other words, are constructive: **allowing people to be slower, to be spontaneous, or removed from 'the outside world'.** In the words of a respondent - David - who spoke with gratitude about the gentle and slow pace of life on Iona, the almost-stillness of the island gave him 'a permission to be still, to be quiet and reflective within myself.' In this way, the respondent statements show how visitors can both create and escape time - or rather, a specific understanding of time.

Clock time and event time

E.P. Thompson in his study of the effects of the Industrial Revolution makes the point that the enforcement of discipline among the labour force was made using the rigorous rule of time³³². People were disciplined in their habits: of work and of leisure, too in accordance with readings on a clock. The popularisation of clocks and, later, the manufacturing of individual and personal time-pieces helped to internalise **these regimes. This is what he means by 'clock-time'.** In contrast to this **conception of time, Thompson gives us another: 'task-oriented time'**³³³, where the duration of particular tasks determines the order of the day. He uses the examples of rural and tribal societies drawn from anthropological studies, where the rhythm **of the day is measured through events: 'In Madagascar time might be measured by** "a rice-cooking" (about half an hour) or "the frying of a locust" (a moment). The Cross River natives were reported as saying "the man died in less than the time in

³³² E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-discipline, and Industrial Capitalism' in *Past and Present* 38:1 (1967): pp. 56-97.

³³³ Thompson, p.60.

which maize is not yet completely roasted" (less than fifteen minutes)'³³⁴. There is a discipline with this, too, but the clock plays less of a role in determining the order of the day, than the tasks and the duration of time that they are perceived to require. The sociologist Robert Levine makes a distinction that resembles that of Thompson's: clock time as separate from 'event time'³³⁵: that is, scheduling determined by specific activities. Like Thompson, Levine sees 'event times' prevalent in rural and farming communities (marking the evening by 'when the cows are going out for grazing', for instance) but he updates the concept to contemporary society too, arguing that phrases like 'it's too early to go to sleep' help to show the gap between event time and clock time³³⁶.

With regard to visitorship on Iona, this distinction between clock time and event time becomes significant. The 'out of time-ness' of Iona can be seen, not as an escape from time itself, but as a shift from clock-time to event-time. Likewise, the slowness or stretchiness of time that visitors speak of experiencing could be seen in a similar notion - not being bound to the clock, and the rhythm that it sets, makes time on Iona more elastic. For instance, if we understand visitor time on Iona as 'event-time' or we can see how days are structured, not necessarily according to hours on a clock but according to certain events: meals, shop visits, walks, drum circle meetings. Consider the following:

**I like to go to the meditation at 8.35... and then going into
silence for 20 minutes. It is really a joy. I enjoy it. I really mean -**

³³⁴ Thompson, *Time*, p. 38.

³³⁵ Robert Levine, *A Geography of Time: the temporal misadventures of a social psychologist, or how every culture keeps time just a little bit differently* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006).

³³⁶ Levine, *A Geography of Time*, p. 89.

enjoy. That grounds me. I usually do some [?] class exercises. Like to go barefoot through the garden and really **grounding myself...**

I've been lying on the ground on a blanket for the first three days. I don't know, three or four hours a day. Just sort of sucking up, in, whatever. Listening to the ground, listening to the waves.

Respondent: Johanna

We have met Johanna in **the previous chapter**, in her declaration that **'Cois Na Farraige [is] the place for me.'** Johanna's description of her days on Iona are a clear illustration of event-time: a progression of meditation sessions, exercise, resting, soaking up the sound of the waves or the feel of the ground. Through this we can see Johanna's **understanding of the looseness** -even irrelevance - of time in **the moments when she is 'listening to the ground, listening to the waves.'** Clock-time is not absent here (she mentions the specific time that meditations start), it is simply secondary. Notice that, as she speaks, her narration shifts from using standardised measures of time to increasingly fluid measures of duration: she begins at 8.35 - a precise noting of clock time and specifies the next measure of 20 minutes. **However, by the 'time' she has reached the end of her narration, her own sense of time (seen in her estimation of duration, for instance) has loosened too.** This 'quirk' of narration nonetheless can be read alongside two **features of 'time' on Iona:** first, that, visitors' experiences on the island involve transitions between clock time and event time (and the other way 'round) and second, that the understanding of Iona's specialness largely requires an escape from 'clock time'. In visitor narratives, Iona seems most special when it is least bound to this conception of time.

* * * *

Iona as 'thin'

I think the thing I'm most taken with is the idea that it's a thin place. And that the veil between the spiritual and the real is very thin. I think for me the connection with nature (I'm looking at the sea!) and the abbey and the fact that I've got time and space, it allows change and reflection.

Respondent: Tara

Here, we hear from Tara: a respondent in her fifties. Tara is a frequent visitor to Iona, having come up for over twenty years. She usually comes up by herself, she tells me, but there is something particular about her visit in the year that we meet: the previous year, her husband passed away, making this the first time she will be on Iona since his passing. Tara tells me that even when her husband was alive, she **came to Iona on her own: 'he didn't like coming up, he didn't like travelling much at all, really'.** In the extract, Tara talks through the connectedness she feels on Iona: through her experience of nature, through the Abbey, through herself. She uses a particular term to explain this - **the 'thin place'** - a phrase referred to previously as being important to the presentation of Iona, specifically in religious and spiritual literature.

The phrase comes from George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community, who **is said to have called Iona a 'thin place where only tissue paper separates the material from the spiritual'.** The origins of this quotation itself are unclear - it appears not to be in his writing or Iona or in any directly reported speech MacLeod made. If anything, it seems to be more closely tied in to oral history, and the genre of folklore, with MacLeod's quotation being passed on and incorporated into the accepted 'story' of the island. The phrase has been taken to mean several things

(the veil between the material and the spiritual, between the ordinary and the sacred), but the most common visitor interpretation of Macleod's phrase has to do with the idea of Iona being on the cusp between 'this' world and the 'other'. Specifically, it carries the possibility of otherworldly encounters: with the mystical, supernatural, with the celestial, with the mysterious. We can recall, for instance, the grassy mound near the west end of the island that carries the reputation for having been the place where Saint Columba communed with 'angels', or the idea that St. Oran's chapel is haunted by the dissatisfied spirit of Saint Oran, angry at having been buried alive. Celestial beings - and encounters with them - are sometimes referred to by spiritual or meditation-based groups that use such language to describe their work on Iona: devi-worshippers, here to train in receiving and accepting the 'goddess', for instance, or groups practising Angelic-healing.

Here, I am pushing that line of reasoning further still: arguing that if the idea of connectedness allows us to capture a range of narratives about mythical and imaginative Others (as it did with Richard and his 'ghosts') then the notion of Iona being 'out of time' allows to see why this connectedness might have especial potency. To do this, we would need to consider not simply what the 'thin place' tells us about interactions between different empirical and non-Empirical characters, but also between different conceptions of *time*. Consider this extract below:

Be thou, triune God, in the midst of us as we give thanks for those who have gone from the sight of earthly eyes. They, in thy nearer presence, still worship with us in the mystery of the one family in heaven and on earth.... If it be thy holy will, tell them how much we love them, and how we miss them, and how we long for the day when we shall meet with them again.... Thus shall we come to

know within ourselves that there is no death and that only a veil divides, thin as gossamer³³⁷.

This prayer (reported to be the prayer recited on the day Macleod died, in Iona Abbey) introduces the possibility that Iona's gossamer-thin veil allows for the worlds of the living and the worlds of the dead to touch. In Chapter Five, I addressed the idea of metaphorical landscapes - the set of cultural and symbolic meanings that have been read onto specific places. In Macleod's prayer, the concept of the 'thin place' is oriented around life and death, and the suggestion of Iona being a thin place is linked with the possibility of 'meeting' loved ones who have passed. On Iona, I found this to be a consistent theme. Death was a topic that came up regularly in interviews, with visitors speaking of the death of other people who used to love Iona, the death of islanders themselves that affected and was felt by visitors, their own deaths, too. On a sunny day, at three in the afternoon, while I was on a break from my shift in the café, I spoke with a visitor who had been visiting the island for several years - a known face, even among islanders. She told me she was not sure how many more trips she would make to the island, but that, in her reckoning, Iona would be a good place to die.

In the same image on the Abbey wall in which the 'thin place' quotation appears, is another: 'If I be destined to die on Iona, it were a merciful leave-taking...' ³³⁸.

Several respondents mentioned that they would like to have their own ashes scattered on Iona. Other visitors referred to scattering the ashes of their loved ones on the island. Kiera, for instance, mentions it during our conversation with her and

³³⁷ George MacLeod, *Whole Earth Shall Cry Glory: Iona prayers* (Iona: Wild Goose Publications, 2007), p. 88

³³⁸ On the wall, the quote is attributed to Bishop *Adomnán*, who was the ninth Abbot of Iona and who authored the biography of Saint Columba.

Niall. Another of my respondents - Nathaniel - had made a trip to Iona (his first specifically for the purpose of **scattering his father's ashes ('I've been carrying them in a pickle jar. It looks very suspicious.')**). I witnessed two instances of ashes being scattered as they were happening. The first, from a distance, watching a line of people ascend Dun I (the highest point on the island), make a circle and scatter the ashes of a family member; the second, taking place in the nunnery - when a family visiting from the United States held a short prayer, and dispersed the ashes of a grandfather at the site. A variation on the theme came from one respondent, Beth, who said that when her mother died, the family considered scattering her ashes on Iona but then decided against it. Standing at a high point in the North End, looking out towards the sea, Beth told me that her mother's death needed no commemoration: **'she's here.'**

Is the thin-ness of Iona - as articulated by its visitors- **limited to its 'place'?** Beth's comments, and the many respondents who spoke of feeling connected to their loved ones on the island, suggest otherwise. In the way that Richard walked on the streets of Iona to find 'ghosts', or Mirium felt that the kilted Scotsman she saw near the Druid's stone (Chapter Five) had **'been there forever'**, Beth seems to be speaking to a simultaneity: where she is both present with me - that is, the interviewer - at the time of the interview **and with her mother who is 'here'**. How can the same place use two conceptions of time?

To understand this particular play on time, we can look to Ann Game's a fascinating idea **'anachronistic'** space. Writing about colonial ideology, Game notes that the branding of the **'archaic'** and the **'modern'** in Victorian colonial imagination meant that **'geographical difference across space** [was] figured as a historical difference

across *time*'³³⁹. Game notes, that is, that the same 'space' can encode or represent different - specifically 'out-of-time' - elements. Here, I am suggesting that the notion of Iona as a 'thin place' gives us another glimpse at this idea of anachronism within places. The scattering of ashes, the remembrance of loved ones, the sense of nostalgia, even watching one's children run around Iona's streets in the way that one used to: these can then be reframed as moments when different notions of time were challenged, or collapsed, and when Iona seems 'out-of-time' and consequently, special.

The limits of the 'out-of-time'



Figure 6.3 | 'Lunch served from 12 pm', Menu Board, Iona Cafe

Iona's café, where I worked part-time during my time on the island, is open from ten thirty in the morning until four thirty in the afternoon, six days a week. Across the entrance door, a big blackboard with the menu written in the chalk greets

³³⁹ Anne McCClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 40.

customers: ‘Welcome to the Garden Café. Lunch from 12 noon.’ And yet, each day, a regular stream of customers came in at 10.30 and 11, asking for items on the lunch menu. This required the same explanation each time: *we only serve lunch from noon, I’m afraid, it says so on the board. We have cakes, teas and coffees that we can do until then.* Some people stayed. Often, they left, off to hunt for soups and sandwiches. Bemusedly, a colleague at the café asked, ‘I don’t get it. How can people want lunch at 11 am?’

Graham Dann notes that tourism involves an ‘altered framework’ of time³⁴⁰ when, among other things, meal-times are not bound to the clock. Perhaps the visitors in question have been up early that day, perhaps their bus tours have made them hungry, perhaps they have skipped breakfast and would like a bigger meal. Any of these reasons could explain the urge to lunch at a time not conventionally set aside (within a specific cultural frame of reference) as ‘lunch’ time. What causes the tension in these encounters, is the fact that, while visitors are working with an altered framework, the café staff are not. Iona’s out-of-time-ness seems to collapse at the gate of the garden café; in the place of the café, ‘lunch’ is for the afternoon. There are such places and situations where Iona’s out-of-timeness may be tested: in the island shops, which all observe a closing time, or at the jetty when boats follow a schedule, or when attending time-bound events. In each of these instances, there may be a conflict between clock-time and event-time but unlike all of the other examples used in this section so far, here, it is *clock-time* that must take precedence. My suggestion here is that such incidents can serve to show the limits of Iona’s out-of-timeness and, consequently, its specialness. If we interpret these

³⁴⁰ Graham Dann, *The Language of Tourism: a sociolinguistic perspective* (Wallingford: Cab International, 1996), p. 211.

conflicts between clock/event time more broadly to include conflicts between Iona as rooted 'in and of' the times and Iona as out-of-time as we have done in our discussion on nostalgia and anachronism, we can see other such possible disruptions.

How, for instance, does the visitors' sense of Iona as out-of-time confront the view of wind turbines, or a delivery van bringing groceries from Tesco? If part of the **'time-plays' on Iona that construct its specialness requires the application of** nostalgia, how does this nostalgia sit with the construction of new homes or the arrival of more cars on the island? Some of these questions will be answered over the course of the next two chapters but for now, I am using them to raise the limits of this narrative of Iona as out-of-time. And, indeed, as a consequence, the selectiveness of **the 'specialness' that it builds.**

* * * *

'Unpacking' specialness

Earlier in this chapter, we met Richard who spoke of the sense of community that **he associated with the island. The word 'special' had come up unprompted** - as it did regularly in the conversations I had with visitors. His comments on the connectedness of Iona were a response to my having asked him to clarify what he **meant when he used the word 'special'. We can pick up that conversation from** where we left off, with Richard speaking of Iona **as 'a place of belonging'**. I push this question further, asking him if he specialness as having to do with belonging and he answers,

That's one thing. I think the specialness as well is the proximity to surroundings, to the environment and nature. It's just fabulous and a lovely thing to do. And that sense of real safety. Doors unlocked.

Cars keys with the ignition on. That sense of at ease and being **relatively safe and secure in those terms, wouldn't it be wonderful** if the whole world was like that.

Respondent: Richard

This brings us to the key idea of specialness, the contents of which I have tried to **'unpack' in this chapter. Notice how Richard's narration teases many of the** concepts we have taken up earlier: safety, security, comfort, ease, connectedness - to the environment, to other people **even to seemingly 'out-of-time' actions like** leaving car keys in the ignition, leaving doors unlocked. **Richard's observation about** the doors takes us back to beginning of the chapter: to the image of unlocked doors on Iona and the rich set of metaphorical meanings these material objects can conjure. We can see, for instance, how doors can variously represent: a sense of **separation from the 'inside' and the 'outside'**; a moral, reciprocal relationship in which **those 'inside' feel secure in their place and those 'outside' are trusted**; a shared place that, even if partitioned, is communal; a nostalgic image of time: of a **'simpler' life, or lost past**. The unlocked door can stand for openness, for hospitality, for welcome, for belonging, **and what is 'thin-ness' if not the promise** of an unlocked door?

Commenting on how stories accumulate over time, Rob Shields writes that many place-images together contribute to the creation of collective place-myths, or even **'yarns' whereby 'myths and images function as insider stories and hence as part of symbolic constructions of community'**³⁴¹. Here, I am using the unlocked door as an

³⁴¹ Rob Shields, *Places On The Margin*, p.262.

illustration: to demonstrate, first, the potency of **symbols in generating ‘place-myths’** and second, the complexity of meanings that such place-myths can have. **What Richard’s narration here shows is the many meanings that specialness on Iona can have for its visitors, once we are able to ‘unpack’ the term.** We can visualise the various understandings that this chapter alone has **as a ‘word cloud’** as we did in the case of Cath (Chapter Four).



Figure 6.4 | An emic ‘net’ of specialness on Iona

What this ‘word cloud’ gives us, then, is an emically-generated ‘net’ of specialness of Iona. It is a catalogue of (some) of the epithets that visitors themselves use to understand and describe the island. And in the way that we can use the concept of ‘specialness’ to catch different etic-terms like ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ (as the discussion in Chapter Four highlighted), on Iona, the term ‘special’ can allow us to catch this clutch of terms and to see the ways in which they interact with each other. This interactivity is crucial to the process: it is interaction of the sense of safety and her rooted-ness to the island **that allows Kiera to think of it as her ‘safe**

place’; it is the interaction between the geographical separateness of Iona and the **closeness of the community that lends potency to Richard’s feeling of** connectedness; and the possibility of out-of-time connections to non-Empirical **Others leads Iona to be thought of as ‘thin’**. In this way, it is the interaction between different aspects of Iona- of which the three in this chapter are prominent, but not exhaustive, examples - that **‘specialness’ represents**. In this way, these terms become the contents of the special.

Nonetheless, these contents of the special are also limited. The viewing of Iona as **‘safe’ for its visitors** co-exists with the vulnerability of island life: the lack of certain infrastructures which may usually be taken to represent civic safety for instance (means of law enforcement, the provision of health services) or the openness of the island to the elements and the risks that come with it (gales, ferry cancellations, dangerous sailing conditions). **The viewing of Iona as ‘connected’ can ignore the fractious history of the term ‘community’ on Iona** (‘I hate when visitors ask me if I’m part of the Iona Community’, an islander told me, ‘No, no, no, they’re quite separate!’). **Finally, the viewing of Iona as out-of-time can sit at odds with the contemporary life of the island - as a busy, modern, lived-upon place. Iona’s out-**of-time-ness is a luxury, and perhaps it is only its visitors that can experience it; in the backrooms and offices of the island, staff and islanders remain bound to clock time. If the special as a category is built upwards from these elements, then it follows that it must take on their characteristics, too. Which means that we are left **with a ‘special’ that is fluid**, relational, participatory - and selective.

* * * *

In this chapter, I have worked to show an emically-generated conception of **specialness on Iona**. This continues the exploration of the visitor as a producer by showing the ways in which visitors interact with the material and metaphorical aspects of Iona to **interpret, and shape, the island as ‘safe’, ‘connected’ and ‘out-of-time’**. These various understandings about Iona can each have an internal logic: **safety works through a paradigm of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ whereby Iona is defined in relation to the mainland**; connectedness allows the visitor to negotiate and build their social capital; **Iona as ‘out-of-time’ works with the idea of a departure from clock-time**. Nonetheless, these qualities exhibit many similarities: they interact with and often bolster the other; they work through particular symbols; they are relational, affective and selective.

In this way, the chapter has used the contents of ‘specialness’ to also unpack and identify certain features of specialness at large. The next chapter takes this enquiry forward by showing how the participatory nature of specialness can be seen in everyday acts of visitorship. In ‘gazing’ and ‘possession’, it offers two ways in which to see the selectiveness and interactivity teased in this chapter as instructive to the production of place. Finally, the present chapter also speaks to the larger argument in this work by anticipating how the convergence of notions of safety, connectedness and being ‘out-of-time’ can lend to Iona being seen as a ‘home’ for its visitors.

7. Specialness III: Process

In the previous chapter we looked at the different qualities that are caught up in the ‘specialness’ of Iona. Throughout, there were two aspects that were emphasised: first, that all of these aspects can work together, or separately, in the viewing of Iona as special. Second, that the ‘special’ emerges through interactions between visitors and the island: it is interactive. It concluded, however, by showing the tensions with all three categories taken as a whole and teased the selectiveness of the narrative of the special. This chapter begins with the way in which selections and rejections result in the construction of specialness. I discuss the ‘gaze’ of visitors on Iona, and the role of the gazing in mediating visible and hidden aspects of Iona, and the construction of specialness. The second process to be taken up is the idea of possession and how, through a variety of everyday acts, visitors claim a kind of ownership of the island and consequently, their place in the conversation on Iona’s specialness. Together, gazing and possession show that the special is constructed and borne out of immediate engagement between visitors and the place they visit. In this way they underline the selective and participatory nature of the special. And with that, we return to Iona: to a lone sheep on a hill in the North End.

* * * *

What Darla Sees

Darla: Yesterday it was really funny because I was sitting there, and there was this mother lamb and they had this baby. And one of the babies was way up on the hill. I mean, that [it] was pretty far away and it was bleating, like, making a lot of noise. And finally I had to go up and go look to make sure it wasn’t hurt or trapped in the fence... So there it turned out that they couldn’t see the mother, and the mother was on the other side. And the mother came around and when the baby saw the mother, it came running down the hill, you know, making

its little happy sounds and whirling down... You're surrounded by the lives of the sheep here too. And the birds. The seagulls and the oystercatcher. And the seagull and the oystercatcher is what I wrote my story [about]

[...]

KB: Are you a tourist on Iona? Is that a word you would use to describe yourself here?

Darla: No. I'm a visitor.

KB: What's the difference?

Darla: I see the tourist as... not being part of the now. They're just looking. They're kind of like window shopping. They don't step into the window. You know like you're looking at a store. They're just *like oh, look look look look look*. They don't, they're not dropping into the energy of the environment.

We have met Darla previously, in chapter six's discussion of safety. Darla is a fifty-year old visitor to Iona from California on her third visit to the island. She always stays in *Cois na Farraige*, a house owned and administered by the Findhorn Foundation. Darla and I have walked from there to the tearoom in one of the hotels, where this conversation is taking place. For Darla, who finds Iona special and comments on its esoteric, powerful quality and sense of peace, stories like this one serve to clarify her relationship to the island. The story (a touching moment between a lamb and its mother) attests **to some of the qualities bound up in Iona's specialness** discussed previously. The theme of connectedness emerges in the relationship that Darla sees between herself and the sheep, and the lamb and its mother. **This connection is explained in two ways: first, through Darla's participation with the scene - in her going over to see why the lamb was in distress. Second, through the co-existence that Darla refers to when she notes being surrounded by 'the lives of the sheep' and the birds that are part of Iona, too. We can also see the theme of safety: a story about a sheep believing itself to be**

abandoned but, eventually, being found by its mother. In the way that the previous chapter showed that there is value in the safety assured from the threat of risk (**'safe from'**), the rescue of the lamb builds **Darla's understanding** of a place that is safe: for sheep, for seagulls and oystercatchers and, as chapter six showed, safe for women like Darla: female visitors walking by themselves at night. We can see the **'out-of-time' quality in this story, too, in its embracing of what** has been termed as a Scottish pastoral vision, it can be seen to reflect a particularly urban nostalgia.³⁴² In this way it demonstrates the interactions between the various visitors' contexts: **the story that brings together Iona's geographic construction** as a rural island, along with the discursive constructions of safety, connectedness and out-of-timeness, **along with Darla's position as a visitor who 'sees'.**

This position (**the visitor who 'sees'**) is, I am arguing, the key to understanding how Darla constructs Iona's specialness. The process is suggested by Darla herself: through the cultivation of a particular way of seeing. Notice that Darla clarifies the **difference between two different kinds of 'looking'**. There are the tourists who simply **'look, look, look'**, the implication being that there is something incomplete or superficial in their looking. There is something of Conan Doyle's **'you see, but you do not observe'**³⁴³ distinction in Darla's suggestion that the tourists look but fail to understand what **they see because they are not 'dropping into the energy of the environment'**. In the repetition of the **'look, look, look'**, Darla also conjures an image of a tireless, ravenous process of looking: consuming the sights, without considering their meaning. In this, she **seems to confirm Cranshawe and Urry's**

³⁴² John R. Gold and Margaret M. Gold, *Imagining Scotland: Tradition, Representation and Promotion in Scottish Tourism since 1750* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), p. 62.

³⁴³ Arthur Conan Doyle and Sidney Paget, *A Scandal in Bohemia* (London: G. Newnes, 1891), vol. 2, p. 162.

comment that the association of sight-seeing with superficial visual consumption means that **'to be seen as mere sightseers would embarrass even the most seasoned tourists.'**³⁴⁴ In this portrayal, there are echoes of the undesirable tourist-type that early theorists of tourism such as Daniel Boorstin sought to critique: tourists on an **uncritical project to 'see the sights'.** Darla, however, **distinguishes** herself from such tourists; she is, in contrast, a visitor. Importantly, in distinguishing herself from **such tourists, Darla also distinguishes her way of 'looking' from the tourists' way of looking.** When Darla looks at the North End, she does not simply see a croft with sheep grazing on it, she notes the drama of an abandoned lamb, found by its mother. By her own reckoning, this is **not mere 'looking', it is participating.** Through her participation, Darla **'drops into the environment' of the place.** There is a dual process here: **Darla's way of seeing is different because** she does not simply look, she participates. And, through this participation, Darla is able to see different things. By Darla's own account, **piercing through the usual images of Iona to see something else, something more,** is what sets her apart from tourists. Her gaze is **the point of difference. This 'gaze' is a key element in the construction** of the special, and gazing - the cultivation of a particular way of looking - becomes an important process through which the special can be built. This occurs in two ways: first, in the way that the nature of the visitor gaze influences the interpretation of the island and second, in the fact that the gaze determines the relationship between the visible and hidden elements of the island, and accordingly, their role in **Iona's** specialness.

³⁴⁴ Carol Cranshawe and John Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' in Chris Rojek and John Urry (Eds.), *Touring Cultures*, p. 178.

The gaze

The ‘gaze’ has a long lineage in academic study, with its origins in Michel Foucault’s formulation of the ‘medical gaze’ that he saw as regulating relations of power in hospitals³⁴⁵. Foucault argued that the gaze was an instrument of power exerted upon the designated patient-and-subject. By using a particular lens and a particular way of seeing, the viewer holds the potential to define what she is seeing. Applying the idea of the ‘gaze’ to the field of tourism, Urry conceptualised the ‘tourist gaze’, which we have taken up in chapter two. Urry’s broad contention is that tourism ‘results from a basic binary division between the ordinary/everyday and the extraordinary’ and that the gaze is an instrument for this differentiation³⁴⁶. Urry posits that there are two distinct forms of the gaze which are often defined against each other: the Romantic gaze and the Collective gaze. The ‘Romantic gaze’ of tourism, typically structured around natural landscapes, is one that promotes solitude and natural beauty; in contrast, the collective gaze thrives on the presence of crowds, and the impression of bustle and activity.

The concept of the gaze-at-large has been widely applied across different fields, including the study of travel: Pratt applies the ocular metaphor to her work on ‘Imperial Eyes’ and the institutionalisation of hegemony in European travel writing³⁴⁷, McMahon notes that the ‘miniaturisation’ of islands, of seeing them as

³⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).

³⁴⁶ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 11

³⁴⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge, 1992).

‘small’, is supported by a panoramic gaze³⁴⁸, and Crang writes about how tourism employees both shape and are shaped by the gaze³⁴⁹. A particularly relevant use is in the work of David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely on Scottish heritage, wherein they posit a **‘social gaze’ of the Highland landscape that resembles Urry’s ‘Romantic gaze’**. They write that these landscapes **‘are presented as natural, composed of bare rugged mountains, inhabited only by eagles and stags (at bay, naturally)’**³⁵⁰, demonstrating a modified version of the Romantic gaze where the populous-ness of the scene comes not from the presence of other people, but from animals and elements of the natural world. This precise idea of unpeopled landscapes has been identified by McCrone et. al. as a theme in the marketing of tourism in Scotland. They point out **the importance of ‘wilderness’ as a trope in the understanding of the appeal of the highlands, arguing that this ‘wilderness’ pertained specifically to unpeopled landscapes.**³⁵¹ A similar identification of the importance of wilderness and solitariness in the gaze on Scotland may be seen in the work of John and Margaret Gold who argue that the eighteenth and nineteenth century trend of Highland Romanticism **‘effectively redefined landscape taste’**. Scottish landscapes increasingly promoted a **‘pastoral vision’** and emphasised the beautiful, natural, emotive and wild³⁵².

³⁴⁸ Elizabeth McMahon, ‘The gilded cage: From utopia to monad in Australia’s island imaginary’ in Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation* (Routledge, 2003).

³⁴⁹ Philip Crang, ‘Performing the tourist product’ in Rojek and Urry, *Touring Cultures*.

³⁵⁰ David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely, *Scotland the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 59.

³⁵¹ McCrone et. al., *Scotland the Brand*, pp. 200-201.

³⁵² John Gold and Margaret Gold, *Imagining Scotland* p. 62.



Figure 7.1 | The ‘Romantic Gaze’ of Iona

These are four photographs of Iona, sourced from the internet. The two on top are from the website ‘tripadvisor’ and the two at the bottom are taken from a website run by Iona’s own island Community Council. Both illustrate the usefulness of Urry’s framework of the ‘Romantic gaze’ on Iona. Iona, we have seen, has often been defined in terms resonant with that of Urry’s and indeed, with the work of McCrone and the Golds. Its epithets range from ‘remote’, ‘beautiful’, ‘natural’, ‘peaceful’ and ‘quiet’, all playing to a particular Romantic gaze. Further, its association with literary figures associated with Romanticism and the Celtic Revival (Samuel Johnson’s declaration to the ‘romantic ruins of Iona’, for instance) serve to strengthen this gaze. Finally, its importance as a place of retreat for artists has led to the production of a number of landscape scenes in postcards, photographs and artwork that reinforce the Romantic gaze of Iona.

Gazing on Iona

In the way that Urry uses it, the gaze is made by tourist agencies and tourist literature and these gazes influence the ways in which visitor expectations are set. The tourist gaze is not, in other words, the *tourist's* gaze, it is the gaze of tourism, **mapped on to places. For this reason, Urry's model has been seen to deny the tourist agency in the construction of the gaze,**³⁵³ **convey a 'static, auratic' quality whereby** changes in the gaze, or responses to the gaze cannot be studied,³⁵⁴ and overemphasises the **potential of tourism to 'master'**, even annexe, the sight³⁵⁵. This understanding of the gaze considers visitors as agents and the gaze itself as dynamic. In addition, it was seen to have contributed to an overemphasis on the visual in the study of tourism.³⁵⁶ The gaze of the visitors on Iona, I will demonstrate, is neither static nor simply a visual process; it is imaginative, discursive, and sees the visitors as agents in its construction.

I am walking back from Columba's Bay to the hostel one afternoon when I find Ulrich. He is seated on a rock next to Loch Staonig, staring into a map. I recognise him as the only other inhabitant of Columba's Bay when I had been there not twenty minutes ago; he recognises me as a girl from the hostel in which he was also staying. We speak, and he tells me that he has heard about the Spouting Cave: a curious formation in the southwest corner of the island that shoots up water and foam several meters into the air at half-tide. He wants to find it. I had read about the Spouting Cave myself and wanted to see it, too. We attempt to find it together

³⁵³ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 31.

³⁵⁴ Simon Coleman and Mike Crang, 'Grounded Tourists, Travelling Theory' in Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (Eds.), *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*, p. 8.

³⁵⁵ David Chaney, 'The Power of Metaphors in Tourism Theory' in Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (Eds.), *Tourism: Between Place and Performance*, pp. 198 - 200.

³⁵⁶ Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, *The Semiotics of Heritage Tourism* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2014, p. 2.

(it is not clearly marked on Ulrich's map and I don't have a map to hand), doing a recorded interview as we walk along the cliffs in the south west of the island. Ulrich shows me some of the photographs he has taken as we go, stopping to take more photographs along the way. The one below, of the cave beginning to spout, is his.



Figure 7.2 | *Respondent Photographs: 'Ulrich'*

Left: Three sheep on a hilltop at sunset; Right: The Spouting Cave

Ulrich: **I think it's very much beautiful things here... And the beauty speaks to us: The birds and the sheep and the nature of course. The wind and the sea, the spirit. Everything speaks to us. They say that there's three ways to the heart: beauty, by good things, by truth.**

Three things that speaks to your heart. Beauty is everything.

KB: What I liked about the photo about the sheep you showed me is that [you said that] there was a harmony. Is that something you look for?

Ulrich: **Yeah, to catch the eye of a bird, or... you think it's this way?**

KB: **I don't know. I really have no idea.**

Ulrich: **[It's]** very laid back, relaxing. Sort of Garden of Eden.

KB: This place? Or Iona in general?

Ulrich: Iona. Fresh, because of the rain. Green grass. And a sort of **freshness, like a Garden of Eden [...] the quietness is also... there's very few cars here. That's also a good thing, I think.**

KB: The fact that only islanders are allowed to have cars?

Ulrich: Yes. No cars in Eden.

[The conversation continues and is interrupted when we find the cave. We **clamber down to the rocks, and watch the water ‘spout’ several metres into the air.**]

KB: You said Iona is a relaxing place. Do you find moments like this relaxing?

Ulrich: **No, it’s exciting. It’s wild. And other places** - not so busy.

[The cave spouts]

KB: Oh wow - **that’s big one! Look a bit close!**

Ulrich: So you can have a second shower today.

[The cave spouts again]

Ulrich: **Oy oy oy, it’s like a volcano! That’s exciting! I will take a**
picture.

Ulrich is a minister in a Scandinavian church in his forties. He is on Iona to understand more about Celtic Christianity. This is his second trip. His wife and two friends had travelled up with him but they had left two days previous; he has a week left on the island. A striking theme throughout **Ulrich’s narration here**, and the whole conversation, in fact, is **that of beauty. Ulrich comments on Iona’s beauty** repeatedly, and uses certain images to clarify it: the green grass, the sheep, the spray of the sea. For him, this beauty is Edenesque; quoting from the Bible later in the interview, Ulrich reinforces that there is something of the Bible in Iona. Central to **Ulrich’s understanding of beauty is an** accompanying idea of harmony: a word he uses several times through the course of the conversation. He illustrates this sense of harmony by showing me a photograph he took previously, also included at

the start of this section: three sheep on a rocky ledge at sunset, each appearing to follow the other.

This, for Ulrich, is harmony: he used the word to describe the photograph, pointing to how the sheep looked against the setting sun. Ulrich's idea of harmony resonates with that of Darla's that we have seen previously: whereas Darla saw harmony in the fact that the lives of humans and the lives of animals on Iona were intertwined, Ulrich sees harmony in the way in which the natural elements on Iona balance with the lived aspects of the island: the sheep with the Edenesque landscape. If we return to Urry's formulation of the Romantic gaze here, we can see that Ulrich's conception (and those of Darla's and Sabine's - whom we met in Chapter Three) both lend well to it. Urry's propositions are that the gaze is founded on a conception of natural beauty and second, that it valorises solitariness as opposed to the busyness of the collective gaze. We can confirm this through Ulrich's emphasis on Iona's beauty and harmony and his construction of those values against the busy village centre and the other marks of collective habitation (such as cars). Ulrich sees the village centre of the island as 'out of place' (but only slightly, as he clarifies). The rest of Iona is an aesthetic ideal in which the cars are an intrusion ('no cars in Eden', he says). Darla, we can remember, had acted similarly: highlighting a pastoral scene taking place far away from the bustle of the village centre, where tourists 'look look look' in a way that resembles the teeming collective gaze of Urry's model.

And yet, there is a curious interruption that takes place in Ulrich's conversation with me: our discovery of the spouting cave itself. In the way that Greenblatt describes the power of a 'wonder' as something that can 'stop the viewer in his

tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness³⁵⁷, once the cave begins its spouting, our conversation halts too. As the transcript shows, what follows are short **exclamations and statements about what we're seeing taking over from Ulrich's** long-form narration. There is a sense of irony to the fact that our conversation about how peaceful and tranquil Iona is occurred a few feet away from a loud, busy water formation, when the sound of the sea crashing was loud enough that we needed to speak loudly in order to be heard. I ask him specifically about this: on his remarks about the peacefulness of Iona. His response is to shift to a different term: **excitement. Witnessing the spouting cave shifts Ulrich's view of Iona from being** (simply) a peaceful place to one that is exciting and wild. We see here two processes simultaneously: the way in which Ulrich gazes upon Iona (as a place of natural beauty) and the way in which this understanding expands this to include things and places that he had previously not witnessed (the spouting caves and its particular wildness and appeal).

This makes clear that Ulrich's gaze is dynamic and evolving, shifting with new information. The 'way of looking' influences the things visitors like Ulrich see, but conversely what is seen also has an effect on the gaze itself. Moreover, his gaze is not purely visual. He uses his camera to take photographs, for instance - an act that Sontag has seen to be both a kind of passive observing but also as a way of experiencing, determining and participating with reality³⁵⁸. **Ulrich's photography,** therefore, is participatory. Then there is the fact of Ulrich (and my) journey to the

³⁵⁷ 'Stephen Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder,' *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1990, p. 170.

³⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 9-12.

cave itself. Ulrich's map gave him only a vague idea of where the cave was (it was not an explorer's map), and neither of us had been there previously. Our trek to the cave involved some collective guesswork, and some amount of fruitless wandering. At one point during the walk, Ulrich slipped on a muddy track, nearly losing his footing. Our eventual discovery of the cave was by chance: we saw a large spout of water come shooting out of a point in front of us, and clambered our way to the nearest point. This journey (of walking, of exploration, of discovery) is participation too, and ought to correct the purely visual understanding of what the act of 'gazing' involves. The off-road walk introduces him to an Iona that is wild and exciting, expanding his conception of Iona's beauty. In this way, Ulrich's gaze is not simply visual and nor is it static: it expands, contracts, includes and excludes.

The limits of the gaze

We have so far considered what falls within Ulrich's gaze: what he 'sees' and imagines, that is. While his way of looking is indeed dynamic and participatory, it is nonetheless exclusionary. Ulrich's focus on the beauty of Iona, we had seen, was constructed against the village centre. At the end of the interview, Ulrich expresses his hopes that Iona continue to be calm and peaceful, and that the busyness and building is kept to a minimum. This is an interesting tension in Ulrich's narrative and indeed, in his gaze. Possessing neither the serenity nor the excitement that Ulrich perceives in places on the island such as the Spouting Cave, the village tests the limits of Ulrich's Romantic gaze. Nor is Ulrich the only visitor whose gaze experiences such a strain. In chapter three, I clarified my fieldwork method and the strategy of the semi-structured interviews: these, I noted, favoured flexibility, with respondents being given enough 'room' to speak about what they wished, but nonetheless containing some 'stock questions' that every visitor was asked, to build

in some structure and to allow cross-comparisons. One such ‘stock question’ asked visitors to comment on what, if anything, they found to be ‘out of place’ on Iona. The naming of the ‘out of place’ aspects of Iona usefully clarified the dominant ways of seeing the island. The most common response to this question was ‘cars’. Other common responses were: the construction site for the new houses, the number of houses itself, the crowds in the jetty at certain times of the day, the ticket office for historic Scotland, the fact of ticketing at the Abbey, particular buildings and houses on Iona judged to be not as attractive as the others, and one or two of the island’s establishments judged to be ‘not particularly friendly’. Here is one such response:

“What struck me was, like, the way that it’s not as wild as I thought it would be. You have hundreds and hundreds of tourists everyday, there’s all these tourist shops. You’re walking around, and you’ll come across a field with a house in it. And this house is massive, double glazing, looks really nice, and probably costs a million pounds. And you’re like, I thought this was a wilderness.”

Respondent: Ben

We have earlier discussed the ‘social gaze’ of the Highlands that prioritises wilderness, and its possible application to Iona in Chapter Five. In Ben’s comments, we see how the expected ‘wilderness’ of Iona works against its everyday life as a place of residence. The idea of Iona as natural plays out against the idea of Iona as human, the idea of Iona as wild seems to contradict Iona as inhabited. This is not particular to Ben, nor even Iona’s visitors. Bell and Lyall note the wider tendency to see wilderness as natural, despite the fact that the concept of wilderness has changed in its meaning over time³⁵⁹. Journalist and writer Neal Ascherson notes that

³⁵⁹ Claudia Bell and John Lyall, ‘The Accelerated Sublime: Thrill-Seeking Adventure Heroes in the Commodified Landscape’ in Coleman (Ed.), *Tourism*, pp. 24-25

the nature conservation in Scotland in the late twentieth century often saw human agency as purely destructive in relation to landscape. He notes a reported statement made by Max Nicholson, one-time Director of the Nature Conservancy, that **‘modern man cannot hope with some serious preparation and training to be anything other than a misfit and a blot on the wilderness scene’**.³⁶⁰

This presumed separation between wilderness and habitation, nature and human presence, can help to explain Ben’s reaction. For while Iona may be remote and rural, it is also populated and busy, especially during the summer season. To many visitors, this busy-ness is a shock. He is surprised that Iona is popular and that islanders live a quality of life that is not, to his mind, consonant with the image of rural islands that he holds. Ben does find the wildness of Iona: among the rocks in the North End, where he is conducting his research on the **island’s geology**. This, we have noted previously, is what is special to him; the village is not. Many visitors come with a similar expectation to Ben’s, and those that do are often surprised and sometimes even disappointed. Joshua, a day tripper on a longer two month tour of Scotland and Spain, expressed the view that the Iona of his imagination had **‘much less on it than the real Iona’**. The references to it as a pilgrimage spot and as a mythic place, he said, built an expectation that he was coming to somewhere remote: not a place with a village or a franchised shop. He describes his own reaction as one of **‘great surprise... I was shocked, actually.’** To other such visitors, **Iona’s signs of life** (its houses, wire fences, telephone poles and cars) can invite such reactions. Consider, for example, the difference between the image to the

³⁶⁰ Reported in Neal Ascherson, *Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland* (London: Granta, 2003) p. 230.

left (Iona's jetty as on a travel website³⁶¹) and the right (Iona's jetty at peak time on one of my observation days):



Figure 7.3 | Iona Jetty: the Romantic gaze and the Collective gaze

The point, in this comparison, is not to claim that one of these is ‘the real jetty’ and the other is not. But the two images alongside each other should show how the emphasis on the Romantic could result in a shock to a visitor if they visited the island expecting to see the first, but seeing, in effect, the second. This is not just a visual ‘shock’, it is an imaginative and discursive one, too. It challenges, for instance, Ben’s notion of Iona as rural or wild; it challenges Joshua’s ability to see Iona as remote. Going back to the idea of tourism as interpreted through ‘signs’³⁶² that we worked with in the previous chapter, what does the crowded jetty signal? Its reminder of ‘clock time’ can fracture the notion of Iona as out of time, the long crowds gathered can challenge the cohesiveness of the ‘connected’ nature of Iona, the very fact of the ferry and the comings-and-goings of visitors shows the separateness of Iona that is important in the ‘safe from’/‘safe to’ formulations to

³⁶¹ https://www.visitscotland.com/wsimgs/Isle%20of%20Iona%20ferry_1488366904.jpg

³⁶² Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 3.

be incomplete. What this helps us to do, in the present enquiry, is to study the limits of the gaze that visitors have for Iona. Gazes, we have established, can include, but **they can also exclude. To go back to Ulrich, Iona's houses and busy village life, cars and the crowded jetty are some of these exclusions. Consequently, they are left out of Ulrich's understanding of specialness. These are visible symbols of Iona's working and thriving resident (and visitor) life, and visible elements of its landscape; so how is it that the gaze of specialness writes them out?**

Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall, building on Giddens, write that one of the features of interacting with images in contemporary societies **is a process of 'disembedding'** - the separation of social relations from local contexts - and then reconstitution, where images (stripped of their original context) are worked with to create something new³⁶³. This first half of this process - **the 'disembedding'** - somewhat **echoes Foucault's critique of museums** as mausoleums that stripped objects of their original context and hence their original meaning, and served to encase them as sealed and dead artefacts³⁶⁴. This process of disembedding is also noted in the work of Julia Harrison who writes that part of the way in which her travellers interacted **with a place was through the creation of imaginative 'maps' that functioned as ways in which they came to know a place. These visitor 'maps' of a place, she writes, had more to do with the visitors' own imagination of the place and 'had little connection, either historically or contemporaneously, to the place and the people who actually live in the locations'**.³⁶⁵ If we go back to our discussion of the Romantic

³⁶³Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (Eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 16.

³⁶⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Different Spaces' in *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. 2 (London: Penguin, 1998), 175-85; see also Theodor Adorno, 'Valery Proust Museum' in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

³⁶⁵ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 167.

gaze, some of this disembedding becomes evident in the wider portrayal of landscape as unpeopled³⁶⁶. Marie MacArthur's pioneering work on Iona, referred to extensively in chapter three, repeatedly states that the ideal presentation of Scotland has utilised an image of landscape as unpeopled, to the extent that people were routinely airbrushed from the 'blasted heaths and hills of mist' in the writing of Scottish scenes in travelogues.³⁶⁷ MacArthur's argument takes the form of a warning: that the depopulated gaze of the landscape has produced a lopsided sense of Iona's history: one that her own work seeks to correct. In this light, does not location of Iona's cars, telephone poles, and shops outside of the Romantic gaze of visitors, produce a lopsided sense of Iona's specialness, too?

On the politics of visibility

In chapter two, we noted MacCannell's use of Erving Goffman's theorisation of the 'front' and 'back' regions in a place to posit that tourist sites were, necessarily, places of 'staged authenticity'³⁶⁸. Goffman applied the dramaturgical motif of 'performance' to everyday life and argued that different regions invited different kinds of performance. He understood the region as 'any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers to perception'³⁶⁹ and separated the 'front' region - the place where the performance is given - from the 'back' region - where the rules that apply during the performance are lifted. The front region, much like the stage

³⁶⁶ Melanie Hunter, 'British Travel Writing and Imperial Authority' in Kristi Siegel, *Issues in Travel Writing: Empire, Spectacle and Displacement* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2002); Carol Cranshaw and John Urry, 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' in Chris Rojek and John Urry (Eds.), *Touring Cultures*; McCrone et al, *Scotland the Brand*.

³⁶⁷ E. Mairi MacArthur, 'Blasted Heaths and Hills of Mist: the Highlands and Islands through Travellers' Eyes, *Scottish Affairs* 3 (1993) pp. 23-31.

³⁶⁸ Dean MacCannell, 'Staged Authenticity: arrangements of social space in tourist settings' in *American Journal of Sociology* 79:3 (1973), pp. 589- 603.

³⁶⁹ Goffman, *Presentation*, p. 66

inside a theatre, required certain kinds of observance and performers in the front region adhered to rules of decorum. In contrast, the back region functions like the backstage area in the theatre where barriers to perception (from the point of view of the audience) affords certain liberties. In the back region, **‘the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course’** and the illusions and impressions to be performed in the front region may knowingly be cultivated³⁷⁰. **In this way Goffman recognises that ‘performance’ often** requires the erasure of its own tracks. He writes:

In many service trades, the customer is asked to leave the thing that needs service and to go away so that the tradesman can work in private. When the customer returns for his automobile - or watch, or trousers, or wireless - it is presented to him in good working order, an order that incidentally conceals the amount and kind of work that had to be done, the number of mistakes that were first made before getting it fixed, and other details the client would have to know before being able to judge the reasonableness of the fee that is asked of him³⁷¹.

Here, **Goffman locates the importance of a ‘presentation’ of work without showing** the effort of its construction. In my conversations with the General Managers of **both Iona’s hotels, both said that, in the business of hospitality, it was important** to provide a service without revealing the effort and mechanics of that provision. **My own experiences of work in Iona’s café (which, notably, had a cooking area without a separating wall, meaning that café customers could ‘gaze’ into the** kitchen and preparation area) involved training in similar techniques. How to cater in situations of high-volume without appearing to be in a rush, how to veil the effort that goes into producing food, even while putting it on display. There are a dizzying

³⁷⁰ Goffman, *Presentation*, p. 69.

³⁷¹ Goffman, *Presentation*, p. 71.

array of organisations and individuals involved in the everyday care of Iona as a place of tourism and caring for the **‘special’ is very much part of the everyday work** on the island.

The fine balance between visibility and invisibility on Iona can, then, be contextualised within its role as a place of hospitality and tourism. Seen in this light, shielding things from view serves as a valuable strategy for protecting particular images of Iona. The Romantic gaze of the visitor on Iona may exclude cars, telegraph wires and focus instead on beaches and crofts - but the direction of the gaze may well preserve a sense of privacy for islanders themselves, and for those in hospitality. This has two implications. The first, that this process of selection creates its own discontents. By rendering invisible the different mechanics which allow the construction and continuation of the special, there is a risk that **the special itself seems ‘effortless’, and that the everyday work undertaken by the island’s many groups and caretakers** (including the visitors themselves) will be forgotten, or undervalued. This will be explored in fuller detail in the concluding chapter of this work. For now, however, it is the second implication that I would like to consider: that the politics of visibility (and invisibility) on Iona also produces a distinct category of objects and places, that have especial purchase in the conversation on specialness: the category of the hidden.

The objects of the gaze

We are at the top of Iona’s village street, looking down a row of houses: colourful and tightly packed together. The street is lively. There are people walking to and **from the hotel, or taking the ‘short cut’ to the main road, or heading towards**

Bishop's House or to the post office. All of this activity taking place on the street is part of the local character of the street itself: a lively road in a small village on a remote island. And yet, this life of the village street is, in many ways, a trick of the light. Many houses on the street are not occupied the whole-year 'round: half of the houses on the street are primarily visitor accommodation or second homes, not 'villager' houses. **Only a few villagers live on the village street;** in fact, as a resident of the island, commenting on the sight of several island children on the west road **cycling down to the school in the morning, said to me: 'the west road is the new village street'**. This is one kind of presentation: the presentation of village life enacted not (primarily) by villagers but by visitors to the island. There is a second illusion, too: by presenting the fronts of the houses, the street protects and hides its 'back': the second row of dwelling places, sheds and back gardens that line the strip of land between the village street and the main road. This Iona looks very **different: clothes on washing lines, patches of garden, children's toys lying on the** grass, picnic tables, polytunnels.



Figure 7.4 | Observation photograph from hilltop

This is a photograph taken by me, from a vantage point on a hill that I used for observations in my first month on the island. The row of houses visible in the frame are lined up along the village street, but the street itself cannot be seen. Visible, but only just, are the back-gardens of two of the houses, two upturned boats belonging to one family, and some washed clothes hanging on a line. It is an unusual view: visible only because of the height that I was at. From ground level, high hedges and dense shrubs block the view. And just in the way that those on the street cannot ordinarily see this array of gardens sheds and picnic tables, those seated at the picnic tables and playing in the garden cannot see the street from where they are either. In the row of houses, one family sits down to dinner in the back-garden, one group holds a meditation session in a hotel lounge, a home-owner sleeps in a shed, and a group of volunteers have their regular film night. In this way, the village **street stands as proof to Iona's 'home' life while also obscuring it from view. Here,** then, is the curious **relationship between Iona's** visible and hidden elements: that both are changeable values, depending on how you see and where you see from.

This relationship extends to all of Iona, where there are a large number of hidden things. These can be aspects of the landscape: the **spouting cave, the hermit's cell, the marble quarry** are 'hidden' in the sense that they are tricky to navigate to and difficult to find. The spouting cave is ostensibly visible (when it spouts, it can be **seen from the machair**) but the 'trick' there is to know where to stand and, even more crucially, to know *when* to stand because it spouts only during halftide. This is the feature to which Ulrich and I walked to - the focus of the previous section. **The Hermit's Cell and Marble Quarry** are difficult to find and marshy, boggy land make the route to both treacherous at times. There are other places that are often

hidden in plain sight: Port Bhan, a favourite beach of many islanders, is known in name but is unmarked on many maps of Iona. In the North End, Cois na Farraige (the retreat house of the Findhorn Foundation) is significant for catering to visitors on week-long retreats, and yet it is unmarked and no signs on the road indicate where it is. Closer to the village centre, the village hall and library are unmarked **and hidden in plain sight. On a small island, and one that is prominently ‘on display’** for the purpose of tourism, these unmarked and hidden places are curious elements **of Iona’s everyday life. For our part, we can use them to ask:** In a conversation centred around the visitor ‘gaze’, what is the value of the hidden?

The paradox of specialness

My contention is that hidden things are key to understanding the process through **which Iona’s specialness is constructed by visitors. To go** back to the participatory nature of the gaze that I had outlined previously, and addressing the ways in which both Darla and Ulrich understand and explain their own relationships with Iona, we can see that both instances are bids at a kind of secret knowledge. Darla, distancing **herself from the superficial ‘looking’ of others, claims to have seen or understood** aspects of Iona that might otherwise evade the eye: the everyday lives of its sheep and birds. Ulrich, through an off-road walk to an unfamiliar part of the island, witnesses a scene that excites him and his imagination. Neither the cave nor the sheep are invisible: the **sheep are a ubiquitous part of Iona’s green landscape, and** the spouting cave, when it spouts, is visible from the machair. However, both are **nonetheless occluded from view: the spouting cave only ‘appears’ at halftide, and Darla’s witness is not to the physical presence of the sheep, but to the social drama** involving a distressed lamb, which, she reasons, she has taken the time to see. These are, in other words, hidden things or at least secretive things that must be

discovered because they are not easily accessed. Darla and Ulrich do this in different ways and it is the fact of discovery that makes their experience special. In other words, their gazing on the (previously, or usually) hidden produces specialness. This is a consistent theme in the data: we had, in chapter five, **encountered George who had brought a friend along to Iona who became a ‘convert’ to its specialness. ‘I’ve got it... Thank you’,** his friend had said to George. I had **analysed the value of this declaration, and George’s own story, as a symbol of the** interactivity of narratives and the ease with which stories **(and Iona’s specialness)** could be passed on. But in that declaration, and the mark of gratitude, we can also see the passing of a kind of secret knowledge: from **George, to his friend who ‘got it...whatever it is that makes Iona so special’.** **We have met Ben earlier:** the geologist among the rocks in the North End. We can recall his statements about why Iona was special to him, because he had spent hours researching it, walking in the bogs and marshes of the North End, in sharp contrast to the tourists that he said were there **‘milling about’ and on holiday. We have met Cath, for whom Iona’s magic lies in the** interaction between the place and the person, a process she describes as mysterious and for which a person has to be open, in order to experience. We have met Rob, who has been familiar with the island since he was a boy and for whom the village hall **(an unmarked, hidden-in-plain sight place) is central to Iona’s specialness. In each of these cases, we see different types of ‘hidden-ness’, and different ways** that the visitors have been able to access it: through walking, through being open to experience, through research, and so on.

The thesis so far has, for instance, emphasised how frequently Iona is seen as **‘special’** and the fact that this epithet has been applied to the different layers of its reputation: as historic, **scenic, religious, spiritual, and so on. Iona’s specialness,**

therefore, is a visible, public and accessible narrative. But I am arguing here that **Iona's specialness also assumes the paradoxical** form of an open secret: a narrative that is visible and yet hidden. It is, in other words, privileged knowledge. Here, we **can look back to Veblen's ideas about consumption addressed in chapter two: where** the consumption of certain kinds of goods were bids for honour, or status³⁷². In a similar light, we can take up Borsay's **postulation of travel as a form of acquiring** cultural capital through competition between and within social classes³⁷³.

* * * *

Possession

The Labyrinth Walkers

*I am seated on a chair in a quiet room, facing the labyrinth walkers. This is a group of ten women and one man visiting from Canada, here for the express purpose of building and walking labyrinths on Iona as part of a contemplative practice. They have been on the island for four days and have three more left to go. They look expectantly at me as I explain what I am studying. I am there because their leader recognised me from my research notice and invited me to meet them. We sit inside the lounge of the hotel they are staying in, as they describe what they have been **doing on Iona. 'The one we made yesterday was enormous', someone says, 'really, really big'. They built it on the** North End, using seaweed they found on the beach. The group leader explains that there is something ephemeral and respectful about building a labyrinth with the material found in that place itself, knowing that it*

³⁷² Veblen, *The Theory of*, p. 225-26.

³⁷³ Peter Borsay, *A History of Leisure: The British Experience since 1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) p. 80

will be washed away with the tide. They tried out a new pattern, picked by her from a book that she carries. 'It was my favourite one that I've walked', says another, 'do you think it'll still be there today?'

This group of labyrinth walkers is not atypical for Iona. Through the course of my fieldwork, there were three specific groups dedicated to walking labyrinths that I was aware of. Moreover, the presence of labyrinths on Iona is also not an anomaly when contextualised within the larger tradition of seeing the walking of labyrinths as part of meditative, body-orientated practice³⁷⁴. There is an official world-wide organisation, The Labyrinth Society, begun in 1998 in St. Louis, Missouri, devoted to popularising labyrinths and labyrinth-oriented practices around the world. In their own words, they **'take labyrinths to hospitals, schools, businesses and prisons... [take] this powerful symbol of peace and hope to third-world and war-ravaged countries. [The members] hold labyrinth walks in the name of world peace, the environment and global unity. They hold the labyrinth in their hearts'**³⁷⁵. Labyrinths have been built in Art museums, public gardens, amusement parks, churches, university campuses³⁷⁶. On Iona in particular, labyrinths made out of seaweed or rocks are common sights in the North End beaches of Iona (usually on Calva beach) or in Martyr's Bay or Columba's Bay. In Columba's Bay, the most number of labyrinths that I counted at one time was four. One stone labyrinth (that had been

³⁷⁴ Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spritual Practice* (Penguin, 1996); M. Kay Sandor, **'The Labyrinth: A Walking Meditation for Healing and Self-Care** *Journal of Science and Healing* 1, no. 6 (2005): 480-483; Mary Joe White and Linda Stafford, **'Promoting Reflection Through the Labyrinth Walk'** *Nurse Educator* 33, no. 3 (2008): 99-100.

³⁷⁵ From the website of The Labyrinth Society: <<https://labyrinthsociety.org/membership>> [Last Access: 24.04.2017].

³⁷⁶ The Rothko chapel in Houston, U.S.A.; The University of Edinburgh, U.K.; The University of Tromsø, Norway; Hampton Court, U.K.; Chartres Cathedral, France; Baire Gauni, India; Haeinsa Temple, South Korea; Capucin crypt, Rome.

there for some years, I was told) and the rest ad-hoc, made from seaweed or stones or pebbles. The practice of drawing (or for that matter, using) labyrinths on beaches was not reserved to the members of special-interest groups such as the one I was meeting with. A few of my respondents said that they had a curiosity for labyrinths, or that they had drawn or built cruder labyrinths or mazes; two said that they **walked the larger stone labyrinth in Columba's Bay. 'Not entirely sure why I did it', he told me, 'but it was peaceful and there was no one else there'.**

*The next day, I meet the same group after tea-time and we walk the short distance to Martyr's Bay beach. They are constructing and walking another labyrinth. This time, I am to be joining them. We begin by collecting ropes of seaweed that are on the beach. The leader draws the labyrinth pattern in the sand with a stick and the whole group lays out the seaweed we have collected along the lines. When it is finished, the leader stands **at the entrance of the labyrinth, to 'hold' the space** (this is her own phrase). She reminds us that there is no right way to walk a labyrinth, and no right pace. We can do it as we please. At least part of this is for my benefit: she knows I am a first-timer and I have confided in her my worry that **I don't know really know what to do. The labyrinth is not a puzzle or a maze to be** worked out, she says. There is a route; we just need to walk it and make what we will of the experience. The first person enters and, a few minutes later, a second person follows. We take it in turns to go around the pattern (I am told later that **it's a classical design**). After everyone has finished, we are invited to stand inside the labyrinth, at any spot we choose, for a quiet moment of reflection.*

In being present for the building of the labyrinth, I was also a witness and a participant in the construction of specialness as it happened. For visitors and certainly for the group that we have looked at, the labyrinth marked a second special place (the designated zone) *within* a special place (Iona): another instance of the layering of place. Labyrinths, as material artefacts, must necessarily be located *somewhere*; the fact of this one being drawn on a beach in Iona roots it, literally, on the island. But the material interacts with the metaphorical, as this thesis has consistently emphasised, and a walk through the labyrinth is also a walk through the discursive layers of Iona. The labyrinth exemplifies many of the elements of specialness we had worked with in the previous chapter. It is a way of **showing and creating connection with the island ('connectedness')**, it creates an explicitly-marked **'safe space' for the exploration of individual identities ('safety')** and its attention to stillness and pace while walking can help visitors both escape **'clock time' and create the feeling of being out-of-time, or timeless**. Further, it demonstrates the processes we discussed earlier in this chapter: the importance of gazing in the construction of the specialness. The labyrinth, as a special place, shows the selections and rejections seen in the process of gazing: choosing a particular spot to build on, for instance, and drawing the boundaries of the place with a view to enclosing it. I had argued that the gaze of specialness relies on the special being seen as hidden knowledge. Labyrinth walking as a means of bodily engagement and self-knowledge may well do this, too. It helps to consolidate some of what we already know about the special, but we can now use it to tease out something new: the idea of possession.

* * * *

Possession as a contested issue

The issue of labyrinths had come up in the first Community Council meeting that I attended. One of the islanders noted that the construction of these labyrinths was **something of a 'nuisance' not least because it renders ground otherwise suitable for grazing, unusable**. The grass underneath the stone labyrinths wilts and dies, making it unsuitable for consumption by sheep (this is especially a problem on **Columba's Bay** which doubles up as part of the West End common grazing for islanders). When, in the Community Council meeting, it was announced that the National Trust for Scotland would be conducting their bi-annual work weeks on Iona and were, per usual, looking for suggestions from islanders about tasks that needed doing, the **clearing of the labyrinths in Columba's Bay was raised as a suggestion and passed on**. When the work week did eventually happen, three or four months after the meeting, I made sure **to be present for 'participatory observation' during the clearing of the labyrinths**. We worked with efficiency, lifting the stones and placing them in the buckets for carrying away. One labyrinth (the one that had been on the beach for some years) was left intact. This was as per the notes taken of the **Community Council meeting which specified that it was the abundance of 'copy-cat' labyrinths that was the problem, and that this 'original' labyrinth could stay**. We worked on other labyrinths instead, teaming up to tackle each one. There was one structure in particular that caused some dilemma - it was not a labyrinth, it was a stone Celtic cross. I and another volunteer had already started removing some of the stones that comprised it; but should we continue? The matter was addressed to the group leader of the NTS event. He seemed hesitant: it had not been mentioned on the task notes he had been given. He asked if anyone knew how long that structure had been in existence (I had seen it even at the start of my fieldwork, four months previous) and, in the end, decided that we would leave it be.

If what we have seen in these episodes are three distinct perspectives on the labyrinth on Iona (broadly, the islanders, the National Trust and visitors), here I work with the idea that, in these attitudes, we are also seeing three different narratives of *possession*. As the material we looked at on Iona in chapter three **clarified, no one person or group ‘owns’, ‘runs’ or ‘manages’ Iona. The National Trust owns most of the island; Historic Environment Scotland owns and co-administers its most profitable ‘attractions’ - Iona Abbey and the Nunnery; the Iona Community co-administers Iona Abbey; individual residents own or lease the crofts and houses they live in; individual non-residents own holiday houses and second homes on the island; the income from tourism (from visitors, that is) sustains the islands; the work of seasonal staff sustains the visitors. This elaborate network of people and groups is involved with Iona’s everyday life as a visitor spot. In this complex picture of care, can we see different - and sometimes competing - conceptions of possession, too?**

In the case of the National Trust, HES, the Iona Community, land-owners and home-owners, possession can be applied in a straightforward and legal sense. The National Trust *legally* owns the two big farms on the island, an island family *legally* owns **Dun I (the island’s highest point) and the area surrounding it, a family in Perthshire legally owns one of the island’s** houses which runs as a seasonal cottage for guests. The conception of possession I want to work with, in contrast, is less obviously applicable and it extends beyond the purely formal-legal (and literal) meaning of the term. Consider, for example, the fact of the controversy revolving around the gates to Iona Abbey that we looked at in chapter four. Specifically, we noted the

islanders' and visitors' opposition to HES' proposal of locking of the bottom gate of the Abbey (which was, at the time of my fieldwork, kept unlocked and was used **commonly by islanders, staff and regulars as a 'short cut'**). The locking of the Abbey gates is not simply a problem of balance or of sealing interpretations to Iona, as I have previously theorised, it is also a problem of possession. The island-at-large **does not 'possess' the Abbey, even if the Abbey stands on island ground. But the** locking of the gates and the outcry over it demonstrates that formal-legal possession can be matched by powerful conceptions of possession founded on different principles: of importance, or legacy, or inheritance.

This is *symbolic* possession, which, even if it does not have its basis in a legal right to place can nonetheless be powerful and well-reasoned. There is some precedent for seeing symbolic actions as kinds of possession, and as important to visitorship, too. Rob Shields, for instance, notes that claims on place can be made through the **formulation of 'place images' which symbolically constructed the community within it,**³⁷⁷ Godelier sees humans as transforming nature through symbolic acts³⁷⁸. On an island with as many stake-holders and organisations that co-exist and share resources and spaces, possession can emerge as a contested issue precisely *because* it can be conceived in different ways.

³⁷⁷ Rob Shields, *Places On The Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) p. 262.

³⁷⁸ Godelier, *The Mental and the Material*, p. 150.



Figure 7.5 | Labyrinths in Columba's Bay

From top left: The 'original' labyrinth; a newer labyrinth; the NTS' Thistle Camp in action; stone construction of Celtic Cross

Let us go back to the labyrinths for a moment. This set of four photographs was taken by me on the day of the clearing in Columba's Bay. The photograph on the top left is of the largest and oldest labyrinth on the beach - the 'original'. The one to its right is a 'copy-cat' labyrinth, made in a different design. It is this category of labyrinths that we cleared. To the bottom left, is the cross made from stones and to its right, an image of the team doing the clearing. This set of images shows a similar process of claiming and reclaiming in action. The stone labyrinths in **Columba's Bay** present three distinct pictures of ownership: the mark of the visitor, making a special place; the mark of the islander who uses the ground as a grazing area for sheep; the mark of the National Trust - the official landowner. The visitor makes the labyrinth and the NTS clears it away, a reflection of the comparative

weight of the two narratives of possession. This issue of comparative power is important, especially in an island with so many stake-holders, and while the visitors' marks of symbolic possession may be powerful and evocative, they are (at least in this instance) ephemeral. Interestingly, we can also see this issue of comparative power in the fact that the NTS team chose to leave the cross - a Christian symbol and also a possessive mark - intact. The reason for doing so, I have identified, was situational: the leader had not been given instructions about the crucifix and needed to make a decision on the spot. However, his hesitation to dismantle the structure shows the implicit hierarchy of symbols; the labyrinth is lower in this hierarchy than the crucifix. There is some resonance here with the asymmetry of **power in Iona's representation that has been addressed earlier in the thesis: of its** Christian story being emphasised over others. In the clearing of some marks of possession but not others, we see this asymmetry in the imaginative understanding of the island materialised. But by that same logic, can we say that balance is restored by the fact that the original labyrinths remains too? Can we see them as competing marks of possession? Or, in the fact that both were known to have been made by visitors to Iona, can we see them as powerful and symbolic bids for possession by visitors to Iona?

* * * *

Possession and place

Islands have a long and chequered history of being viewed as places that can be, or even must be, possessed. John R. Gillis, in an excellent account of the evolving **'idea of the island' over time, writes that if outward expansions and trading in the** sixteenth century was founded on the discovery of new continents and landmasses, the explorations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took the form of a

search for islands. He calls this ‘islomania’³⁷⁹ and sees the need to possess the island as an expression of imperialist structure: a progression that came after discovery, exploration and documentation. Jenn Fuller notes that in the long historical period between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries marked as the ‘Age of Discovery’, there was a scramble for Pacific islands by European powers³⁸⁰. She uses the work of Ernest Dodge who writes that the historical impetus to partition islands ‘culminated in some form or degree of European or American political control of every piece of South Pacific real estate’³⁸¹, to highlight the ‘bicker of possession’ over islands³⁸². Fuller emphasises that the political possession of islands was also matched by other forms of possession. The role of scientific documentation of islands as acts of possession, for instance, features in Gillis’ analysis, but to this we can add the broader idea of the ‘civilising mission’ that was applied to islands through missionary activities. We can see this as a kind of moral possession, with Fuller making the point that missionary activity modified the argument about the possessing of islands but gazing the act as a humanitarian imperative³⁸³. What possession means in this instance is not so much the exertion of political and economic power as it is a kind of ‘taming’ of the moral and spiritual characters of the islands³⁸⁴. Elizabeth McMahon’s argument that seeing islands as ‘miniaturised object[s]’ leads to their being commodified and seen as a ‘locus of desire’.³⁸⁵

³⁷⁹ John R. Gillis, ‘Taking history offshore: Atlantic Islands in European minds, 1400 - 1800’ in Rob Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation*, p. 19.

³⁸⁰ Jenn Fuller, *Dark Paradise: Pacific Islands in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 4-5.

³⁸¹ Ernest Dodge, *Islands and Empires: Western Impact on the Pacific and East Asia, Volume 7, Europe and the World in the Age of Expansion* (University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 183.

³⁸² Fuller, *Dark Paradise*, pp. 4-5.

³⁸³ Fuller, *Dark Paradise*, p. 6.

³⁸⁵ Elizabeth McMahon, ‘The gilded cage: From utopia to monad in Australia’s island imaginary’ in Rob Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation*, p. 192.

McMahon writes about the ‘collector’s attachment’ for instance, referring to the literal buying of islands as a marker of wealth. She notes that Richard Branson, after his acquisition of the Virgin islands, said that ‘it was the brightest jewel I’ve ever found.’³⁸⁶

These arguments show that possession, when applied in relation to islands, has been seen in scholarly terms largely as aggressive acts of dominance. This is consistent with how the concept of possession has been applied to the writing of places in general, but notably within the context of travel. In her work on travel writing, for example, Mary Louise Pratt reflects on imperial ideologies that influenced relations between Europe and the non-European periphery, and how they translate into the writing of places. She identifies three tropes in travel writing that each represented an ideological position. These are: the scientific and poetic study of the natural and primal world that formed the agenda of naturalists such as Linnaeus³⁸⁷, the trope of inward consciousness that is marked by autobiographical writing and sentimentally drawn journeys (she uses Mungo Park on the Niger as an example)³⁸⁸ and finally the trope of mastery that rests on particular imperial visions of seeing geographic spaces as ‘won’³⁸⁹. Referencing Pratt’s work, Julia Harrison argues that the three tropes formulated by Pratt still have relevance in contemporary tourism. In her own sensitive work on Canadian travellers, Harrison shows how these three tropes of the ‘poetics of science’, ‘planetary consciousness’ and ‘master-of-all-I-survey’ were

³⁸⁶ Elizabeth MacMahon, ‘The gilded cage: From utopia to monad in Australia’s island imaginary’ in Rob Edmond and Vanessa Smith (Eds.), *Islands in History and Representation*, p. 198. The quote is from ‘British Bliss is an Island Escape: No Suntan Lotion required’ *Sydney Morning Herald* (3-4 August 2002), p. 20.

³⁸⁷ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, p. 126.

³⁸⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 15.

³⁸⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 201.

present in the different narratives of her respondents³⁹⁰. Working with the third trope offered by Pratt - mastery - Harrison compares early explorers with tourists and writes that, for tourists, the acts of viewing and experiencing a place can **become ways of 'claiming ownership' in a process that parallels the ways in which the colonial state claimed ownership through geographical discoveries**. She likens the camera of the tourist to the perspective of early writers, arguing that the photographs taken by tourists were a condition of and in turn reinforced their vantage points. In other words, the discovery of a place, even through the eyes of **a tourist or a tourist's camera, can work as an act of possession because it transforms an abstraction (the idea of Edinburgh, received through tourist literature for an example) into a real place (the material city with which the tourist engages when she visits and commits to digital film) and therefore, something that is tangible - and consequently, can be owned**³⁹¹. Can these two broad trends in the understanding of possession (domination and consumption) be upheld in visitor accounts in Iona?

* * * *

Thomas: My connection to the island is in my mind even deeper than being a pilgrim. But [pilgrim] has a connotation that is slightly off for me. And the connotation is one of devotion of worship or separation of pilgrim **to source. And there's a way in the Findhorn metaphysics [to see that] it's a quality that's within one meeting the same quality that's in the** place.

[...]

It's certainly true that [Cois Na Farraige] feels like mine. And that room **feels like my room. It's like, when I go and ask for permission to sit in the sanctuary, I don't expect they'll say no. It's like, okay, I understand that**

³⁹⁰ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 187.

³⁹¹ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 192.

you're the housekeeper, but I've been coming here since before you were born.

Respondent: Thomas

This is one of the clearest articulations of possession among the respondents. **Something about the word 'pilgrim' and the implied relationship** of supplication with a place -surrendering to a place, or seeing a place as containing a truth or a meaning that the seeker needs to find - this does not, for Thomas, ring true. For him, the person and the place meet on an equal footing. However, when pushed by me to consider relations of power, he admits a feeling of possession - even possessiveness with regard to the place. The Findhorn House is not his, but it *feels* like his. The room, used as a sanctuary in the house, feels like *his* room. And if the Sanctuary is *his*, what does that make the Findhorn foundation member who **functions as a warden or a 'caretaker': hosting guests, leading retreats, organising** and leading the meditations, and managing the affairs of the house? Thomas calls her a **'housekeeper': a person in temporary employment who minds a property that** they do not own. The implication here **is that they are 'keeping' the house in order** for people whose home it actually is: people like Thomas. This is a claim to possession, and for Thomas it comes from two sources: first, his association with the Foundation itself. As a lapsed member, Thomas claims specialist knowledge about Findhorn itself (he spoke for a while about Findhorn metaphysics, lamenting some new directions the Foundation had taken and noting the declining importance of Iona as a power place in the conversation in Findhorn). The second claim comes **from his being a 'regular' to Iona, a visitor who has been 'coming here since before you were born'. For** Thomas, Iona is special because it is like home and because they have known it and visited it for a number of years. Likewise, the Findhorn

sanctuary is special to Thomas because it is beloved and familiar. These two factors (the fact of his regular visits, and the fact of his familiarity with the Findhorn Foundation) leads Thomas to make a claim of possession on the Findhorn house and the sanctuary, to see that they feel like *his*.

We see here a modified idea of mastery that Pratt and Harrison posited. Certainly, **his dismissal of a (hypothetical) warden as a ‘housekeeper’, is a play of status where** he is positioned as the rightful master or owner of the house. In this, Thomas not **only satisfied the condition of ‘master-of-all-I-survey’ but also bolsters Pratt’s claim** that the trope of mastery in European travel writing was also an expression of masculinity. In this, she is one among several scholars who have analysed travel writing as a product of gendered relations - in the work of Rosemary Sweet on the Grand Tour as a performance of masculinity³⁹², **for instance, or Jopi Nyman’s work** on how the male gaze was instrumental in the portrayal of Europe in British Fiction in the 1900s³⁹³. However, in his rejection of pilgrim status, Thomas expresses the view that the relationship between people and place should be not one of supplication (which he sees as part of the pilgrimage) but of equality. This is at the core of the metaphysical idea that he states (**‘a quality that’s within one meeting the same quality that’s in the place’**) an interactive and relational understanding **of people and place based on an equal level. What might be called ‘flow’ or even** harmony, like Ulrich did previously in this chapter. **This is not the ‘mastery’ of Pratt and Harrison - or rather, their understanding of mastery as an imposition of power**

³⁹² Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³⁹³ Jopi Nyman, *Under English Eyes: Constructions of Europe in Early Twentieth-century British Fiction* (Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi: 2000).

does not quite apply here. And yet, it is still certainly an expression of possessiveness that is rooted in a sense of inheritance and legacy. Where does this come from?

In chapter three, we noted that the ‘regulars’ are a distinguishable group of visitors to Iona. Regulars, perhaps more than any other category of visitor, exemplify the importance of possession in their relationship to Iona. One of the more common refrains from the regulars can be expressed broadly in the syntax of: ‘Oh I’ve been coming here for [x] years’. I heard this statement used in a number of situations: in general conversations with other visitors, in arguments with HES staff about the rise in ticket prices, in over-the-counter chats with shop assistants and, indeed, in interviews with me. We see this in Thomas’s case, in his comment about having visited Iona several times. John Searle, working within the philosophy of language, addresses the possibility of dual meanings that speech acts can carry so that when **‘the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more.’**³⁹⁴ He calls these Indirect Speech Acts and contends that, through them, the speaker conveys the second meaning of these speech acts through a cooperative **process with the listener that relies on ‘mutually shared background information,** both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality **and inference on the part of the hearer.’**³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ John Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of the Speech Act* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 30.

³⁹⁵ Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, pp. 31-32.

To this we can add **Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual model in which communications function as a means by which relations of power are exerted and defined**³⁹⁶. Linguistic relations, in other words, are a function of power. In Bourdieu's scheme, the possession of 'linguistic capital' ensures the persuasiveness of a speech act. Applying these two theories to the **broad group of 'Oh I've been coming here for [x] years' statements shows** clearly how these statements work as bids for possession. We can see how this group of statement can express and establish linguistic capital: In conversations with other visitors, for example, a regular visitor can give recommendations to newer visitors, negotiate the price of goods in a shop, weigh in on desirable and undesirable changes on the island, share stories with a researcher - because **'I've been coming here for [x] years'**. The strength and longevity of their association with Iona builds the capital, and statements function as ways of expressing this capital. These statements also exhibit the dual meaning posited by Searle. They state a fact (that of regular visits) but they are also a way of drawing in the listener into a particular web of understandings (about **the visitor's position as a regular and consequently 'insider' status**). Their implied meaning is **the strength of the visitors' acquaintanceship with Iona. A staff member working in retail on the island expressed the view that people who shared such statements with her seemed to need a particular reaction from her: that she be impressed, that she treat them differently. In the fact that these statements require certain acknowledgements from the listener in order to work or to have an intended effect, we see Searle's idea of listener cooperation in play.**

³⁹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 37.

Interestingly, from the point of view of most islanders and seasonal staff, this **‘cooperation’ is sometimes tenuous and unwilling. ‘It’s like they feel they own the place’; ‘what I don’t like is visitors who’ve come here for ten years or whatever and walk around as though they own the place’; ‘this man says to me *I’ve been coming here for thirty years in a way that’s, like, saying that he owns me*’**: these are three typical responses from islanders and staff to statements like this. In conversations with island residents and those involved in hospitality, statements like these were **consistently brought up as transparent bids for power** (‘or ‘sheer entitlement’ as an islander put it). In other words, the alignment of possession with domination seen previously was noted by islanders too. And interpreted as a claim for domination, these statements were duly dismissed as being unfounded and frustrating.

However, I am suggesting that this broad group of **‘I’ve been coming here for [x] years’ statements express a more nuanced relationship to the idea of possession. Consider, for example, Searle’s contention that ‘shared background information’ is needed in order to interpret the Indirect Speech Act. Searle is positing that there needs to be a shared context that involves both the speaker and the listener in order for the speech act to be successful** (what J.L. Austin, whose ideas Searle extensively **worked with and refined might call ‘felicitous’³⁹⁷**). My suggestion is that this **‘shared background information’ can be found in Iona itself, and the island’s perceived specialness. That is, when the visitor says ‘I’ve been coming here for [x] years’, they are not simply expressing linguistic capital and bidding for possession: they are also providing testimony for a shared conception of Iona as special. We can see this in each of the three common instances in which these statements were made: in**

³⁹⁷ J. L. Austin, J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, *How To Do Things with Words: the William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011).

the sharing of anecdotes and recommendations with other visitors, in the trading of **'small talk', in over-the-counter** conversations in shops. All of these instances provide opportunities for connectedness and statements like this can provide a means to build connectedness (and hence, the special) through a shared feeling of belonging to Iona. This is still possession and possessiveness of a kind but it is made softer through the cooperative exercise of the visitor, working with the listener, to **share a common sense of Iona's specialness. It opens up the possibility that 'I've been coming here for [x] years' carries it with it an unspoken tail of '...so I think it's special too.'** Acts of possession (whether an expression of familiarity with the island or building of a labyrinth on a beach for instance) when stripped from their associations with purely aggressive forms of mastery can be seen as ways in which visitors participate **in a conversation about Iona's specialness.**

* * * *

Possession as constructive

Karen: **I've sometimes been on that with them. We made a labyrinth on Martyr's Bay** last year, one afternoon. There does seem to be that **urge, doesn't there? To do things like labyrinths, or piles of stones. I** like doing the piles of stones.

KB: Where do you do them?

Karen: Mostly at the North End. Yesterday on the North End I built an archway. Just about big enough for a cat to walk through. **Two piles of stones I managed to... It wasn't quite as I planned. Once before I managed** to make a proper arch with a keystone, which actually stood up on its own and was just free- standing. This time I had to put a flat stone across top and put a sort-of arch on top so I cheated. But it looked good.

KB: Tell me more about the urge you feel to do these things, here? Would you call it that, or am I reading too much into it?

Karen: No, I do. I love taking natural things and playing with them, really. Like, yes, I mean earlier in the week, I collected up loads and loads and loads of limpet shells and made a sort of mosaic with them with a fish and some seaweed, you know, and bubbles going up from those limpets with holes in. I just like being really childish, I suppose.

KB: **Here, in a way that you're not otherwise?**

Karen: I suppose. Well, you get more chance here. Well, I never mind being thought childish, I have to say. More chance to indulge it here. **And the time... and you don't feel that you should be getting on with something else. There's a place on the North End where you get a lot of flat stones... I think I got up to seven once.**

Respondent: Karen

Karen has been visiting Iona for thirty years. She usually visits once if not twice each year. **Our conversation took place during the first of Karen's trips that year, when** she was on the island with her husband and the rest of her family (her daughter, her son, their respective partners and now, her grandson), staying in one of the island hotels. She told me that she would be visiting again in two months, this time on her own and as part of a week-long stay with the Iona Community. She says that she wanted us to walk the Iona crossroad because it brought together the west side and the east side of the island, and her memories of childhood - spent in the holiday cottages in the west side - and of her current association with Iona, where she lives primarily in accommodations in the east side. As we walk along the route that Karen has picked, she tells about her love for the beaches on Iona. One particular beach, Port Bhan, has particular memories for her because she and her siblings spent a lot of time playing on that beach during her childhood. I ask her if she still visits it and **she says, 'Oh I still love it. It's a very special place. But I think in some ways the North End has a little bit of overtaken it'.** For Karen, the North End encapsulates the qualities she likes best about the island: peacefulness and the sense of creativity. I am suggesting that the moment Karen describes in the quoted excerpt **is a way for her to participate in the construction of Iona's specialness through** continuous and creative action.

Here, Karen describes a particularly enjoyable pastime on Iona: playing with stones on the beaches and arranging them into different shapes - a story that connects back to the construction of labyrinths that we saw at the start of the chapter. If we build on the idea that the construction of labyrinths works as a stamp of possession, **a way of building possession onto a place, we can see Karen's activity in the same light.** In both cases, for example, we **see an active 'play' with Iona:** the labyrinth walkers construct the labyrinth using seaweed found on the beaches, Karen uses limpet shells, seaweed and stones found on the beaches in her play. And if the **labyrinths on Martyr's Bay and the stone labyrinths in Columba's Bay were both stamps of possession on the places in which they were built,** Karen's stone structure performs the same function in the North End. This act of possession is not defined by domination and mastery. Instead, we see here a possession that is playful and creative; in **Karen's own words, it is 'childish'.** The **'childishness' that** she refers to issues the important reminder about the dissolution of past and present that was addressed in the previous chapter: the idea that, through the act of playing with **sand and stones, the forty or so years that separate's Karen's childhood from** her present can become more porous (here is an instance of the time-plays that Chapter Five noted). It allows Karen to experience the Iona of her childhood, as part of the **Iona of her adulthood. This process is a key part of Karen's experience of the island,** it builds specialness through the sense of being connected both to the past and to the present.

Earlier in this chapter, I had addressed two trends in the interpretation of possession when applied to islands and travel contexts: the first, that possession was seen largely as an aggressive, dominating action: an interpretation that I have challenged here. The second sees it as a consumptive act. This accompanies a wider trend to

see tourists as consumers: of tourist products, places and experiences. But on Iona and in the playful possession of Karen, we can see how this consumption model can **be challenged. Karen's play is directed not towards consumption, even if she does** use materials collected from the beach. It is productive. Through her play, Karen produces the material structure of the stone arch on a beach, of course, but she also builds and reinforces the imaginative idea of Iona as special, she participates in the construction of the North End as a special place. The labyrinth, the erection of memorial benches, the collection of stones and pebbles, the sharing of experiences, the taking of photographs, the mapping and sketching of places present other material and non-material aspects of this construction: these are not **simply ways of 'consuming' Iona but interacting with it. They each provide symbolic capital, allow visitors to build relationships with particular places on the island, and to participate in the construction of Iona's specialness through acts of possession.**

This sense of participation is key to understanding the narrative of specialness. We can recall, for instance, that certain marks of possession have more than others: an asymmetry seen in other aspects of Iona, too: certain strands of its reputation being more prominent than others, certain types of interpretation or gaze more highly prized than others. A similar principle applies to the dense network of groups and **individuals involved with Iona's reputation as a 'special' place. Seen in this light,** visitor narratives of possession could be seen as responses to a process that does **not see visitors as equal participants in the construction of Iona's specialness (even as Iona continues to rely on visitors in order to remain 'special'). Possession** becomes a way for visitors, people-passing-through, to gain footing within Iona, however temporary, and to bid for a place within its story of specialness.

* * * *

This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of two processes in the construction of specialness by visitors to Iona: gazing and possession. Without presenting these as linear ‘stages’, it has shown the dynamism of both these processes: the shifts within the gaze of the visitor, the emergence of possession as a response to contestation. It has also emphasised the importance of using them to investigate the power of the visitor: studying the ways in which the framing of Iona functions as a means of dis-embedding the island from its context or seeing speech acts as part of a bid to **mark one’s own place on the island. And yet, it also** cautioned against seeing power as flowing wholly in one direction: by showing how islanders can deploy strategies of invisibility and how possession can be playful and constructive.

In this way, this chapter builds upon what we know about specialness on Iona thus far: that it is participatory, interactive, selective. The distinct contributions it makes, however, are in its anticipation of the importance of legitimacy in the discussion on specialness, and in its attention to how visitors use everyday acts in order to establish legitimacy. The next chapter develops this point further by showing why visitors might need this legitimacy on the island, and how specialness provides a suitable means of gaining it. In this way, this chapter speaks to the larger argument in this work by explaining the contested terrain of Iona, and the role and potential of the visitor in participating in such contests, and the importance of (seemingly) banal acts in the making of place.

8. Specialness IV: Function

So far in the thesis, we have seen certain consistencies in the category of the special: in its relationality, its layered-ness, its selectiveness. We have seen that **Iona's layered discursive reputation can be framed with layered stories to create a** similarly variegated idea of specialness. We have seen the variable meanings of the many terms that are attached to the idea of specialness on Iona. We have seen how these qualities are constructed relationally, how gazing and possession both make selections and rejections that place the visitor in a participatory relationship with places. Taken together, these characteristics reinforce the starting point of this thesis: the visitor as a producer of experience, not simply a consumer, and the importance of seeing specialness as a part of this production of experience. This chapter takes forward the idea of specialness as a constructed category and puts it to work. It asks: How can the category of the special that we have developed be applied to the fundamental enquiry of this thesis: the relationship between places and people in the context of travel? For visitors, what does the attribution of specialness on Iona actually *do*? My argument is that specialness must be seen as a practice of arrival and a means of dwelling. It provides **a way for Iona's visitors to be legitimate participants in Iona's everyday life. Through the construction and articulation of Iona's specialness, visitors make 'homes' on Iona and legitimise their** own place within it. This speaks back to wider meanings of travel and the role of belonging, legitimacy and differentiation with it. If we opened this study with how the special is a constructed category, we close it by showing that it is constructive, too.



Figure 8.1 | Village Street

Standing on the ferry from Fionnphort in Mull and looking out across the Sound of Iona, the village offers the first glimpse of Iona. A line of houses along the waterfront: stone structures in brown or white, slanted roofs, front-facing gables, small windows, painted windowsills. When reproduced in photographs, paintings and postcards, the colours are bright, the palette is soft, and the scene is harmonious: the picture of local life on a small Scottish island. At different points, this thesis has shown that the apparent **simplicity and calm of Iona's exterior surface** masks a complex underlying structure. Writing about the island of Whalsey in the Shetlands on which his ethnography was based, Anthony P. Cohen notes how, on the surface, Whalsey seemed to confirm particular **notions of 'ruralness' held in** academic work: the rural as parochial, linked to community, to face-to-face

interaction, simplicity³⁹⁸. By his own acknowledgement, his work was a response to both this academic writing on the rural and an acknowledgement of the appearance of simplicity in islands such as Whalsey. He aimed to ‘convey the striking contrast in Whalsey between its internal complexity and diversity and the ostensible solidarity and homogeneity which it presents to the outside world.’³⁹⁹ A similar argument could be made for Iona where the apparent simplicity and harmony of a row of island homes along a village street masks a complex underlying structure of residence and belonging.

* * * *



Figure 8.2 | Respondent Photograph: ‘Martha’

“It’s the feeling of coming back to a place. The feeling is multiple. I could not say that I belong to Iona by any stretch of the imagination but **I feel like there’s a part of me that does. And [with] that part of Iona** you know, the other way around, I just feel at home.”

Respondent: Martha

³⁹⁸ Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1985]).

³⁹⁹ Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction*, p. 15.

Martha and I are sitting in a restaurant, where I have joined her for a post-dinner drink (**'I have a ritual, you see; you have to have some rituals'**). She is on Iona on her own, staying in the house she always stays in when she comes. Her family usually takes the house for a long stretch of time, and different members decide when, in that time, they will make their visits. In fact, I had interviewed her cousin who left a note for Martha suggesting that she get in touch with me. We watch the sun set over Mull as Martha **describes the scene ('I think the ever-changing light, when you can see Mull, when the sun strikes the Ross in the evenings, it's just magic. There's just nowhere else that beautiful')**. Shortly after, she gets up to take a photograph of the Sound- the image included above. She tells me that scenes like the one we have been watching are why she loves Iona. **'It's a feeling', she says, 'I don't know what it is. It has some level of a warm embrace'**. I ask her for more, for what this feeling is, and her reply is the quotation at the top of this section. She does not belong to Iona, she says (or rather, she states that she cannot say that she belongs to Iona), but she feels like a part of her does. That sense of affinity - that is her **feeling of 'home'**.

When philosopher Bachelard - whose work on topophilia we have taken up earlier - formulated his understanding of the relationships that people made with place, he did so using the example of a house. He noted how the inside of a house represents a clutch of meanings - secrecy, safety, intimacy - and that these qualities rather **than the physical layout of a house build the 'poetics of space' within it. In this way, a house can be seen as haunted or magical, depending on the emotional and imaginative responses that it evokes⁴⁰⁰**. We can see what some of these meaning are

⁴⁰⁰ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 1-6.

for Martha. She was nine months old on her first visit to Iona - she is in her fifties now. Her family came each year until she was six, she visited it when she was at University and, for the last fifteen years of her life, has visited once or twice a year. A visit to Iona for Martha is not so much a journey to an exotic, new territory but a return to a familiar and well-loved place. The many memories and stories she has of the place, is part of this familiarity and this sense of belonging, making Iona her **'home'**. **In this familiarity and belonging, we can see signs of both of the terms we** have identified previously as being key elements of the special - safety and connectedness. In the discussion on these elements in chapter six, I had argued that **'safe' and 'connected' both came with their own clusters of terms (familiarity and belonging were both addressed as part of these clusters)**, and moreover that these terms often bolstered the other. We can see that in Martha's **statement: in how the** sense of belonging she feels works hand in hand with its familiarity. But to push the argument further - what this text suggests is that the elements that often constitute Iona's specialness also serve to create the specific narrative of Iona-as-home.

Iona as 'home'

This particular framing - **of Iona as 'home' to the visitors who find it special** - is not entirely surprising. Material covered earlier in this thesis, for instance, often anticipated this idea. We can remember, for instance, the words of Johanna, in **Chapter Five, who spoke of the Findhorn House as being 'where she belonged'**; we can remember the emphasis on community and belonging articulated by Richard (Chapter Six) and the sense of proprietorship articulated by Thomas (Chapter Seven). We can remember one of the arguments developed in Chapter Five: that visitors use stories to navigate the material and metaphorical aspects of Iona and to find their own special places within it. **Miriam's sense of affinity to the Druid's**

stone, Sabine's closeness to the Nunnery, Rob's to the village hall or Ben's to the North end: the selection of these places is a sign that they have been set apart by these respondents. For Rob, this set-apartness may well have come from the long-lasting association he had had with the village hall and his many memories of it; for Ben, we can argue that it came from having known and mapped the place with diligence by himself for his project; for Sabine, it may have come from the superior imaginative and artistic potential she felt in the Nunnery; for Mirium, it may have arisen from the unexpected affinity she felt with a stranger and with a place which she saw to be laden with memories and stories. There is more: **Beth's love of the North end**, borne of her intimate knowledge of it; **Kiera's sense that Iona was her 'safe place'; and on, and on.** My contention here is that we can see, in these same processes of setting-apart, a **movement to make 'homes'** out of certain places of the island.

This sense of 'home', at points, refers specifically to places of residence and accommodation. Johanna, for instance, always stays in Cois-Na-Farraige, Cath always stays in the Catholic House of Prayer, and respondents who told me they would always stay in the hostel, or in a particular hotel (or, as the General Managers of both hotels confirmed: sometimes, even the same room within the hotel). This is especially common among **Iona's 'regulars'**: of whom Martha is one. **'Regulars'** usually visit the island at the same time each year and often stay in the same place - whether that is the same self-catered house or hotel. Martha always stays in a self-catered holiday let, owned by a family who live off-island. Other members of Martha's family, when they come to visit, usually stay in the same house. The fact that most visitor accommodation allows bookings up to twelve months in advance is an important feature in maintaining this regularity - it is common practice, in

B&Bs, self-catered lets as well as hotels, for guests to book ahead for the next year on or before the last day of their stay on Iona. Moreover, not only do people tend to stay in the same places, but part of the visitor identity on Iona derives from *where* people stay. One of the benches in the garden of the Muir contains an **inscription that says ‘In memory of _____... who loved this island and this hotel’** - showing the importance of an attachment not simply to the island at large, but to a specific place within it. Here, then is one clear consonance between the idea of home-coming that Martha is speaking of, and the fact that many visitors choose to return to the same places of residence while on the island.

However, **the understanding of ‘home’ as purely a place of residence** also exhibits a poverty of thought. **Martha’s own declaration** - that while she knows she not belong to Iona, she nonetheless feels a sense of belonging here - points to a much more complex idea of what belonging, and home, might be. In her study of Canadian tourists, Julia Harrison comments on the **complicated meanings of the term ‘home’** and that for her respondents, the idea of travelling elsewhere was rooted in their **sense of home, which often changed during their journeys. For some, ‘home’ was indistinct from their country of origin - Canada - but for others, ‘home’ became a ‘fantasy’ at the point that they left it, in order to travel**⁴⁰¹: ‘Home, to the travel enthusiasts...was grounded in ideas of family and roots, safety, security, and stability, work and the ordinary, schedules and commitments, and the presence of loved ones.’⁴⁰² In a similar vein, Madan Sarup writes

What makes a place a home? Is it wherever your family is, where you have been brought up? The children of many migrants are not sure where they belong. Where is home? Is it where your parents are

⁴⁰¹ Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 154 - 160.

⁴⁰² Harrison, *Being a Tourist*, p. 158.

buried? Is the home the place from which you have been displaced, or where you are now? Is home the place where your mother lives?⁴⁰³

The 'list' he offers is a rhetorical device, to show some of the different ways in which home can be conceived. Much like the cluster of terms that accompany the understandings of Iona as safe (protected, secure, comfortable and so on), as connected (shared, harmonious, familiar and so on) and out-of-time (still, old, slow and so on), we see different conceptions of home here, too: roots, heritage, centre, sanctuary, shelter, origin, destination. Fascinatingly, **nearly every one of Sarup's** suggested meanings can be matched to particular visitors to Iona who conceive of home **using a similar logic. 'Home' can be where your family is, Sarup suggests** - three respondents had family homes on the island; two had cousins who lived on the island at the time of my project; one was visiting a family member who was, at the time, working on the island. To his suggestion that home can be where you were brought up, we can look to one of the respondents who spent some years of their childhood on the island and who attended the local primary school before their families relocated. Could home be where your parents are buried, Sarup asks? For one respondent, this was the case, and we have - in chapter six - referred to the **practice of visitors' scattering the ashes of their loved ones on the island**, and seen it as a means of place-making too. To **Sarup's linking of 'home' to displacement**, we can match respondents for whom Iona represented an ancestral home - a feeling especially common in international travellers from the U.S.A., Canada and Australia who had Scottish ancestry as a result of Highland clearances in the nineteenth century. **We can add to Sarup's list too: those for whom Iona represents a 'spiritual home' or an 'energetic centre', those for whom Iona felt 'exactly like the place in**

⁴⁰³ Sarup, 'Home and Identity,' p.90.

which I grew up', those who found in Iona a 'place that I could maybe retire to, you know. Just move here, live here, one day...'

Opening out the meaning of the term 'home' opens out the place of Iona for its visitors. It also helps to show what the relationship of specialness and 'home' might be, and why the two narratives lend to either other so well. Chapter Six, for instance, showed how that descriptions of Iona as 'safe', 'connected' and 'out of time' have a particular purchase in the conversation on specialness. Each of these terms, however, came with their own clusters of which terms like 'familiarity', 'sanctuary', 'comfort' were part. If 'home' is a place of comfort and routine, intimacy and familiarity: we can see how the very elements that people identify (and help to construct) can help to frame Iona as 'home'. Further, we can recall how Chapter Seven posited that visitor actions such as taking photographs, collecting stones and trading in stories are bids for possession, and how gazes serve as means of establishing ownership as well. We can remember the association between the construction of the labyrinths and the 'marking' of particular sites on Iona and how actions such as dedicating benches or sitting on a favourite rock can help to inscribe a place for the visitor on the island. Again, my contention here is that we can see these acts that are instructive to the construction of the special also as ways in which visitors build Iona as a home.

Specialness and dwelling

Dwelling, as I use the term, involves three overlapping processes: mapping, building, and inhabiting... It is homemaking. In other words, as clusters of dwelling practices, religions orient individuals and groups

in time and space, transform the natural environment, and allow devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct⁴⁰⁴.

The extract **above is from Thomas Tweed's theorisation of religions as involved with processes of 'crossing and dwelling'**. Working with spatial and aquatic metaphors, Tweed writes that religions allow people to make homes and cross boundaries, seeing movement and dwelling as dual processes in the practice of religion. Working **with spatial and aquatic metaphors, Tweed writes of religions as 'confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries'**⁴⁰⁵. He specifies that religions can help to create three kinds of dwelling places: the body, the home, the cosmos, and in so doing, recognising that dwelling places can be symbolic, corporeal, discursive, geographic and various combinations thereof. Consider the three processes Tweed names: mapping, building, inhabiting. If we look to the material on the special that this **thesis has covered, we can see resonances of Tweed's conceptualisation**. We have, for instance, considered the way in which **body engagements and stories help to 'map' place: producing intimate knowledge and allowing the visitor to navigate Iona's various layers**. In this way, stories help to mediate the relationship between the material and metaphorical aspects of Iona, **giving visitors a chance to 'map' its terrain**. The idea of mapping has also come up in Chapter Seven, in Yi-Fu Tuan's **idea of the spatial competence**⁴⁰⁶ that arises when knowing a place through the body. We saw this, for instance, in the detail with which Beth can report on the North end, and in her awareness of the space that has been **built over several years of 'knowing' the place**. In a similar vein, we have also seen

⁴⁰⁴ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 82

⁴⁰⁵ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, p. 54

⁴⁰⁶ Tuan, *Topophilia*, p. 78.

the **'building' of place through the construction of elements of the special** in the discussion in the previous section: how particular imaginative and material acts help to inscribe place and **'build' homes**.

Here, then, we can take up the importance of the third process mentioned by Tweed: the process of *dwelling*. Iona, we have seen, may well act as a home for its **visitors. But how do visitors then occupy this 'home'**: how does a practice of transience (visitorship) also become a practice of dwelling? Here, Tweed allows us to see the role of specialness as not just a means of arriving or marking place, but as a means of inhabiting it. In the vein of Massey and Knott who, we can recall, saw places as lively and dynamic, Tweed sees **'space' not simply as** a static surface but as **'generated and generative... Spaces do things.'**⁴⁰⁷ He goes on to say, with deliberate mischief, that **'spaces are people too.'**⁴⁰⁸ I am suggesting that the **'generative'** aspect of place lies in the produced behaviours of the people who occupy it.

In the literature on tourism reviewed in Chapter Two, I noted the importance of the idea of tourist consumption. Tourist sites can and have been seen as **'fundamentally places of service and material consumption'**⁴⁰⁹ and I had noted that the critique of the tourist in the early writing on tourism was at least in part a critique of particular kinds of consumption seen to be shallow or wasteful. In the chapters in the second half of the thesis, we have, however, consistently shown the dual relationship between consumption and production. Chapter Five, for instance, looked at how stories serve not just as testimony of place or relationships to place, but as a means

⁴⁰⁷ Tweed, 'Space', pp. 121-122.

⁴⁰⁸ Tweed, 'Space', pp. 121-122.

⁴⁰⁹ John Urry, 'Death in Venice' in Mimi Sheller and John Urry (Eds.), *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 209

of adding to the story-ing of places. **I clarified that Iona's reputation today exists to a large extent because of the various interactions between travellers in the present day and 'mythical' travellers who have helped to produce these narratives. The 'chain of interactivity' that links, say, James Boswell as a travel writer, to a respondent who has come to Iona influenced by his journal, is an example of the ways in which visitors have and continue to produce Iona as a place of repute.** Chapter Six pushed this idea further still, showing how the safety, connectedness and 'out-of-time'ness of Iona were productive exercises too: the 'safety to' engage in particular ways with the island may be represented by the act of a woman walking alone in the street at night, but that same act also help to *produce Iona as a 'safe place' for women. Similarly*, we saw that the connectedness that people feel to different aspects of the island and through other visitors also creates a network through which stories of specialness can be circulated. We have seen that particular actions - lying on the beach for hours at a stretch, not reading the papers, not following the news, making room for spontaneous interactions - also help to build **Iona as a place that is 'out-of-time'. These epithets, therefore, are not just testimonies of visitor experience of Iona - they are instructive in *shaping* them.**

Tim Ingold notes that landscape is not a material thing that is 'pre-prepared for people to live in'. Instead, it is in the process of dwelling that landscapes themselves are constructed. Leaning on Heidegger's assertion that 'to build is itself already to dwell'⁴¹⁰, he at once shows that landscape is not a 'completed' form but that it is always in the process of being constructed and, further, that the creation of homes help to create landscapes.⁴¹¹ There is a curious circularity that we can tease out

⁴¹⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 146.

⁴¹¹ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 162.

here with regard to Iona whereby the visitor actions that serve to produce Iona as **‘home’ (for instance) can help to domesticate the island itself.** The idea that Iona is safe, or connected, or out-of-time, then, creates the conditions for certain kinds of dwelling on the island: when parents may feel comfortable to let their children wander unattended, or when a person travelling by herself may feel secure to strike up a conversation with a stranger, when someone who has recently lost a loved one can feel that they are near. **‘Iona as home’ is, in this framing, not the logical end point of Iona being seen as special,** it is part of an intertwined process whereby things are familiar because they are special, and special because they are familiar. In this way, we can see how the visitor imaginary, body engagements and story-telling are transformative to places in their own way. We have a way of seeing the **regenerative power of Iona’s home-making:** that the mapping, building and **inhabiting of Iona’s geographical and discursive landscape is both a response to its** perceived specialness, but also helps to construct it.

* * * *

‘Home’ as contested terrain



Figure 8.3 | The ‘sod-cutting’ ceremony of Iona’s new Housing Project

This is a photograph I took at the ceremonial ‘sod-cutting’ that inaugurated Iona’s New Housing Project: the result of a thirteen-year long fundraising effort to construct more affordable homes for island families. The summer of 2015, when I was there, saw the start of the process of construction. When I returned to Iona in April of 2016 for a short visit, the houses were up, their allocations were complete, and families had already started living in them. The building of these new houses is not a mean feat. Any decision to make changes on Iona - especially when it concerns building work-needs to pass through several different formal and informal decision-making bodies: from the Argyll and Bute council to the National Trust. The housing project had to pass many more tests than that: paucity of funds, difficulties with contractors, having to change building companies, delays in the start of construction, negotiations with the council about building plans. The beginning of the building work represented the fruition of, at the very least, thirteen years of work and waiting. Rather unsurprisingly, throughout the time that I was there, the housing project was the talk of the town. Islanders checked in on the site with curiosity, noting when the frames went up, or when building work on the walls started. They discussed how the houses might be equipped, and when the construction might finish. They talked about who had applied for the houses, and who might get them. Whatever the outcomes, it seemed to be near-consensus that **the houses represented a victory for Iona’s islanders.**

This sense of victory needs to be understood within the context of the scarcity and contested nature of liveable space on Iona. At the time of my field-work, Iona had 143 residents who lived on the island full-time (that is, all year-round). Not everyone lived in houses that made for easy habitation: typical highland houses

contribute to the vernacular aesthetic of Iona, but the granite walls make for cold living quarters and, occasionally, problems with damp. Newer houses on Iona tend to be better equipped but building on the island is subject to restrictive regulations.

Individual housing permissions are often brought up at the Island's Community Council meetings and put to a discussion (although the Community Council has no final say in the decisions). The building restrictions are enforced in order to preserve **Iona's visual and aesthetic appeal while ensuring it remains a 'living island'** - and **we have, in chapter five, heard from the National Trust's Ranger how this was often** a challenging balance to strike. The whole process, from buying the plot of land to completing the construction of a house, can take between two and five years. The consequence of these restrictions places more pressure on the use of existing properties on the island. Competition for houses is steep as demand far outstrips supply. Neil Ascherson notes that this is an Argyll-wide problem. Housing is in such short supply, he notes, that offering 50% over and above the asking price of a desirable house is routinely required in order to purchase the property⁴¹²: a fact that more recent conversations with islanders has confirmed. On Iona, the problem is compounded by a tension between the desire to build homes and the scarcity of living space.

There are several players in this wrangle over living space. As an island supported to a large extent **by tourism, Iona's seasonal staff and volunteers also need places** to stay. Both hotels have staff quarters, but there are also staff in both hotels who lease other properties on the island. In Iona Hostel, the (usually) three-strong volunteer team each stays in a different place in the hostel premises: one, in a

⁴¹² Ascherson, *The Argyll Book*, pp. 171- 181.

repurposed caravan, one in a repurposed shed, one in a room within the hostel itself. In fact, there is an assortment of island sheds and bothys (and two caravans) that house seasonal staff and, in some cases, islanders too. In the absence of an island cooperative or a regulating agency that manages selling prices, islanders are in competition with visitors for the purchase of properties, if and when they come up. When a house is made available for sale, the sellers are under no obligation to make it available to islanders first, or to offer a discounted price to islanders. In practice, this means that islanders can lose out to visitors who can afford to pay the higher price. On Iona - and indeed in the Scottish Highlands and Islands at large - **there is also the specific category of 'second homes' which have long been** identified as a problem for the local community. This refers to properties with off-island owners that usually stay empty through most of the year, with the exception of the few weeks in the summer season that owners tend to visit. These are not seen to contribute on an everyday basis throughout the year to the local economy of the island. The pre-existing scarcity of living space makes this even more visible and problematic: the fact that the house could be lived in (possibly by an island family), that it could be put to use - these hypothetical possibilities make the reality of periodically empty houses starker. The sheds, bothys, even caravans which some islanders and staff call home for the summer are thrown into sharp relief by large four-bedrooms houses that remain empty.

This disparity often provokes vehement reactions from islanders. Iona may be **'home' to many, but should it not** also continue to be a home for those that live there? Mairi MacArthur, in her work on Iona, identifies as her principal subjects the local residents of the island: the families that lived there, the crofters, farmers, craftsmen - the 'people who have occupied that island and for whom it has *first and*

foremost been their home [emphasis mine]'.⁴¹³ **By focusing on Iona's local history,** she works corrects a peculiar asymmetry in the way Iona has been studied and written about - where its value as a place of residence has been eclipsed by its reputation as a spiritual, religious and Romantic site. If we see this as a case of contested meanings, perhaps no phrase can better illustrate the contest than the **term 'second home' itself. On the one hand, the 'second home' is a metaphorical and symbolic idea that represents a feeling of belonging and familiarity of visitors to the island ('it feels like a second home to me')** and, **on the other, a long-standing problem in Iona's housing situation which confronts Iona's residents.** Both visitors and islanders 'make' homes on Iona, but the symbolic second homes of visitors can coexist uncomfortably with the material second homes of the island's housing stock. **In the same way, particular images of 'homes' can also be seen as challenging.** Previous chapters have, for instance, noted many visitors expressed negative views or apprehensions about certain everyday features of island living: cars, telegraph wires, the construction of new houses. Less common but no less fascinating were **objections to particular houses: one which, the complaint goes, is 'too visible'** - not nestled under the curve of a hill, like many of the older, vernacular houses on the island. **Another house was singled out for looking 'too modern'** (in fact, one of its owners told me wryly that a visitor had stopped her on the street to report that her house was 'an affront to the island'). What does this say about the nature of the contests that play out within visitor spots?

⁴¹³ MacArthur, *Iona*, p. 1.

Contests within place

Writing about the relationship between hosts and guests in tourism, the anthropologist Valene Smith makes a fascinating point about the relative circumstances of the two groups. In her theorisation, the social and economic relationships between hosts - by whom she means those resident in the place of tourism - and guests - tourists themselves - are interlinked. Smith argues that social relationships between the two groups is likely to experience more conflicts when the economic circumstances of guests far exceed that of hosts, pointing to tourism in countries in, say, South Asia, where the relative wealth of tourists in relation to residents can sometimes create fraught relationships. Hosts may charge extortionate prices for services and guests may have a diminished experience of the place because of the knowledge that they are being over-charged. Smith argues that places of tourism where the income disparity is narrower, make for more harmonious guest-host relationships because of the relative equality of both groups⁴¹⁴. **Smith's argument** is an important comment on conflict as a function of the disparity between the comparative status of groups.

For Iona, we have taken up Mairi MacArthur's note about the relative poverty of most of Iona's islanders in the early years of the nineteenth century, in the time that visitors who established the Romantic image of the island - Walter Scott, Stevenson, Johnson, Boswell - visited. In fact, she writes that the impoverishment **of islanders was an 'affront' to the eye of these visitors and notes that islanders were seen as uncultivated, destitute, part of the 'scenery', and sometimes not even** that⁴¹⁵. Added to this is the conflict between particular visions of Highland

⁴¹⁴ Smith, *Hosts and Guests*, p. 4.

⁴¹⁵ Mairi E. MacArthur, *Columba's Island: Iona from past to present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

landscapes - ‘as “natural” composed of bare rugged mountains, inhabited only by eagles and stags (at bay, naturally)’⁴¹⁶- and the fact that they do, nonetheless, have resident populations. MacArthur and Smith make clear are that economic relationships and social relationships are bound up with each other. We have seen this as an early issue in tourism, too. Consider, for instance, the idea of islanders **and seasonal staff as ‘care-takers’ of Iona. In this line of thinking** - seen in the testimony of some visitors - islanders are important in so far as they are custodians of Iona, and help to maintain it as a place of visitorship. The idea of relational position also affects the resentment that some islanders expressed at visitor acts **of possession: the sentiment, for example, that visitors ‘walked about as if they owned the place’**. But just as status is relational, it is also layered.

Take the case of ‘homes’ on Iona for instance. In line with Bourdieu’s expansion of **‘capital’ from its origins as an economic measure to a marker of social and culture** and - hence - symbolic status⁴¹⁷, we can see how a home on Iona can represent two different kinds of capital: the economic means to make a home (which visitors may have) and the symbolic significance of possessing a home on Iona (which islanders have). There is a striking parallel here to the discussion on possession offered in the previous chapter- where the feeling of possession often coexisted with the lack of a formal claim to possession. Visitors to Iona who find the island special may have a sense of it being home, without the formal claim to home-ness. What they lack, **in other words, is symbolic capital. Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as ‘the**

⁴¹⁶ McCrone et. al., *Scotland the Brand*, p. 59.

⁴¹⁷ Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’ in J. Richardson (Ed (New.)), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and **honourability...**⁴¹⁸ and for him this ‘**accumulated prestige, celebrity or honour** [is] founded on a dialectic of knowledge (*connaissance*) and recognition (**reconnaissance**).’⁴¹⁹ The possession of symbolic capital therefore is a matter of recognition - the recognition of superior taste, or a superior image⁴²⁰. They may feel at home *on* Iona, but **the resident’s home** *is* Iona. Consider, for example, the contradictory position towards island homes noted previously - the need for home-making that mismatches with the opposition on the part of visitors towards the visible presence of island homes and construction works. Re-reading that same relationship, could it be that the presence of island homes can threaten or render less legitimate visitor fantasies of dwelling? Where does this leave the idea of specialness?

Specialness in the context of travelling subjects

Chapter two provided a review of the literature of tourism and religion, with a particular focus on the different understandings of the tourist subject. It clarified that while the criterion outlining the tourist subject has been theorised differently, one common point of agreement has been to see the tourist as a mobile subject. Cohen, Stausberg and Norman may disagree on how long one needs to travel to be considered a tourist, and Feifer, Butcher and MacCanell may provide different motivations for tourism - but nonetheless, at the very least they agree that the tourist is at minimum a person who travels, and that tourism is a geographical and

⁴¹⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [trans. Richard Nice] (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 291.

⁴¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 7.

⁴²⁰ Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’ in J. Richardson (Ed (New.)), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

physical movement from one place to another. This understanding is not limited to tourists either. We referred, for instance, to the work of Coleman and Eade who characterised mobility as being the primary characteristic of the pilgrimage. Their **work is a response to the literature on pilgrimage that emphasises the ‘internal’** journey of the pilgrim: they argue that this internal journey nonetheless needs to be located within the body of the pilgrim and the physical effort of mobility⁴²¹. Backpackers, too, have been studied in relation to ideas about movement. In fact, **in seeing them as ‘cultural symbols of this increasingly mobile world,’**⁴²² Greg Richards and Julie Wilson have characterised them as an archetype of mobility. One of the chief characteristics of travel is that it requires a movement *away*, what Urry has termed a departure: ‘[a] limited breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life’⁴²³. In sum, travellers - all travellers - are subjects in motion.

And yet, as this thesis has consistently shown, departures also entail arrivals. We have seen this in chapter five, in the role of stories in inscribing place. In chapter **six’s discussion on connectedness, we made use of Turner’s understanding of ‘communitas’**⁴²⁴ and the extent to which it can be incorporated with the wider **understanding of Iona’s connectedness. In the way that places can be ‘known’** through people, associations with people - informal conversations, the trading of stories and so on - can also be seen as ways of marking arrivals on the island. What **I am teasing here is the first ‘strand’ that this thesis set up in the introduction** - the

⁴²¹ S. Coleman and J. Eade, 'Introduction' in S. Coleman and J. Eade (eds.), *Reframing Pilgrimage: cultures in motion* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 10.

⁴²² Greg Richards and Julie Wilson (eds.), *The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2004), p. 1.

⁴²³ Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, p. 2.

⁴²⁴ Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, p. 33.

strand of visitorship - and the way in which this can inform the understanding of the function of specialness. Here, if visitorship can be seen as a practice of departure, I am suggesting the specialness is a practice of *arrival*. We can go further still: locating the need for this arrival within the process of visitorship itself. Turner, comments, for instance, on the way Brian Sutton-Smith uses his concept of ‘anti-structure’ in his work on order and disorder in children’s games, to propose them as ‘the settings in which new models, symbols, paradigms, etc., arise - as the seedbeds of cultural creativity in fact.’⁴²⁵ In this way, Turner sees the creation of new identities and social relations as a response to *liminality*: the state of being ‘betwixt and between’. In a similar vein, we can recall that the discussion in chapter six noted that the possible depreciation of social capital in travel, results in the motive to create social capital through new forms of community and sociality.

In his radical reconceptualization of travel, James Clifford writes:

...Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. But what would happen, I began to ask, if travel were untethered, seen as a complex and pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension.’⁴²⁶

Taking a cue from Clifford, and the link that he makes between displacement and the creation of meaning, we can see how visitor itinerancy can explain the need to craft a place on Iona - and set the scene for the importance of specialness in doing so. In fact, the rooting of specialness in the context of visitor itinerancy can even

⁴²⁵ This is Turner’s own account (Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, p. 28) of Sutton-Smith’s use, Brian Sutton-Smith, ‘Games of order and disorder’ in *Simpósio Forms of Symbolic Inversion* 1 (1972): 28.

⁴²⁶ Clifford, *Routes*, p. 3.

explain some of the consistent themes in the special that we have encountered. In her work on Elizabeth Gaskell's novels, Ann Colley notes that Gaskell's characters display an acute sense of nostalgia on account of the upheavals they face in their lives. **The absence of what Colley terms 'steadily delineated borders' creates a fluid and changing place, within which Gaskell's protagonists have to 'devise their own sense of how one place, one time, and person relate to another.'**⁴²⁷ In other words, these fluctuations become the very conditions for nostalgia. Given the repeated **emphasis on the importance of nostalgia to Iona's specialness, as my fieldwork has shown, Colley's work gives us a way of seeing why the itinerancy that produces specialness also determines its (sometimes) nostalgic nature.** A similar principle can be applied to the importance of stories. Here, we can look to Jean Haskell's Spear ethnography of Patrick County, Virginia, in which she locates the performance of story-telling squarely within the condition of liminality. Arguing that stories work as a way of establishing status in the absence of other markers of status (economic and political power in her example), **'stories of wit' become ways of marking status and creating identities within her site of study. She goes on to say that 'in a place where liminality is a condition of the landscape, local history, and community identity, it is small wonder that such stories flourish.'**⁴²⁸ A similar case could be made for Iona where we have noted a number of factors that make good breeding-ground for stories: the vast cultural and social imaginary of islands that it has inherited, the various strands of its reputation, the abundance of myths and legends attached to the island, and the notable role of travel speaking within it. In this way,

⁴²⁷ Ann C. Colley, *Nostalgia and Recollection in Victorian Culture* (Hampshire: MacMillan, 1998), p. 87.

⁴²⁸ Jean Haskell Spear, 'Performance as Meaning in a Mountain Folktale' in *Performance, Culture, and Identity* (1992): 117-134. p. 131- 132.

the position of the visitor - as a transient, mobile subject - sets up the value of specialness as a means of arriving, resting and dwelling.

Specialness in the context of multivalent places

Writing about the relationship of travel to story-telling, George Robertson, Melinda Marsh et. al. note that **‘a minimal definition of travel would invoke a movement from one place to another - between geographical locations or cultural experiences.’** Suggesting that this framing is not sufficient, they urge that we the movements in travel as physical as well as metaphorical, and that travel is **‘always a narrative of space and difference.’**⁴²⁹. In a similar vein, Griselda Pollock notes the important of departures in tourism as the means of access to new forms of experience. She writes of tourism as a **‘temporal ellipsis’** which creates **‘a spatial encounter in what is always a fantastic landscape populated with imaginary figures whose difference must be construed and then marked...’**⁴³⁰.

The case of Iona gives us an excellent example of this **‘fantastical landscape’** and also of how visitors can construct **‘imaginary figures’** in their travel. In Chapter Five, we saw Sabine work with the imagined construct of a group of devout Christians who **‘belonged’** in the Abbey and near the Duchess’ cross in a way that she did not. In Chapter Seven, we saw Darla setting herself apart from the many other travellers who, in her opinion, simply **‘looked’** at Iona and its scenes, but did not participate.

⁴²⁹ George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam (Eds.), *Travellers’ Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 2.

⁴³⁰ Griselda Pollock, **‘Territories of desire: reconsiderations of an African childhood’** in Robertson et. al. (eds.) *Traveller’s Tales*, p. 8

We have had numerous instances of respondents in this thesis setting themselves apart from other visitors through recourse to their long association with Iona (the **clutch of visitor statements such as ‘I’ve been coming to this place for [x] years’** analysed in the previous chapter), their many connections to the island (Kiera, with her rich repository of friends on the island) or their specialised and unconventional interest in the island (Ben, the geologist, ruing the fact that people miss out on **Iona’s rocks because of** their interest in the Abbey). We have seen visitors separating themselves from visitors who stayed for less time, or came for different reasons or even more bluntly, from visitors who - **in George’s phrase** - simply did not ‘get’ Iona’s specialness. ‘I’m searching for the word’, Edward said to me, when he and his wife discussed their relationship to the island, ‘to describe myself here. It’s certainly not tourist, it’s not pilgrim because this isn’t a pilgrimage for us, it’s not even visitor’. His suggestion was ‘friend’. ‘How about friend of Iona?’

These are all instances of ways in which visitors use imaginary figures and other devices besides in order to mark their own difference. And yet, narratives of difference are also narratives of affinity. The discussion in Chapter Five, for instance, showed how visitors undertook a process of orientation through stories: placing themselves outside of certain narratives (and apart from groups of people) but also within other narratives (and groups of people). Then there is the notable fact that many of the respondents in this thesis are linked by one understanding that they share (even if unknowingly): that Iona is special. This means that there are simultaneously two processes in play for these visitors: the construction of Iona **as special along with other visitors, and the negotiation of one’s own position in** relation to other visitors. I am positing that specialness has a particular role to play

in *both* processes, once we use it as a means of building consensus as well as marking distinctions.

Here, we can return to the work of Ann Taves. A **key part of Taves' understanding** of specialness, specifically when applied to religions is that it requires the **achievement of wider agreement among the 'deeming' group**. She writes that this consensus helps in the attribution of specialness to religions or spiritualities and **also helps to reinforce the importance of the group's narrative over subjective experience**⁴³¹. This, for her, is a way to negotiate the relationship between the **individual and the collective: the collective ascription of 'specialness' might, for instance, both cognitively and culturally affect the likelihood of individual ascriptions of 'specialness' and likewise, individual ascriptions can help to build a collective ascription**⁴³². It is an artful way for Taves to argue that while in theory almost anything *could be seen to be 'religious'*, **some things are nonetheless generally not agreed to count as 'religious'**. The act of kneeling in a church pew is more likely to **be seen as 'religious'** than the act of kneeling as part of an exercise cycle - **a 'rep' - in a gymnasium**. This comes down to a variety of factors and asserted differences - **and the comparative strength of the 'composite ascriptions' surrounding the church place itself, among others, as a 'special' thing**.

In this way, Taves places the collective at the heart of her study. Without collective legitimation, complex composite ascriptions of specialness cannot be achieved. Her extensive use of Durkheim and the **idea of religion as 'social cement' reflects this**

⁴³¹ Taves, *Religious Experience*, p. 55.

⁴³² Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*.

priority. In her work on religion as revelatory events, Taves argues that it is group agreement and legitimation that makes the difference between revelations that can **lead to the construction of 'religions' and those that do not**⁴³³. The collective, therefore, is the turning point. On Iona, this emphasis is interestingly reversed. Consider, for instance, our discussion on possession and the importance, to visitors **themselves, that they 'own'** - however fleetingly and playfully - particular experiences or places or even memories on the island. Consider alongside this, the frequency with which we have seen different visitor attempts at setting themselves apart: pilgrims, not tourists; regulars, not one-time visitors; here not for the Abbey, but for the golf. Taken together, these two urge a similar conclusion - that, while **Iona's specialness requires a recognition of broader collective opinions and agreements**, it is important - indeed essential - for the visitor herself to feel like **they have discovered or constructed this 'on their own'**.

This is especially important in the category of the 'regular visitors', people who are **inheritors of a wider 'chain of memory'**⁴³⁴: the 'memory' of Iona as a special place. And yet, **nearly every 'regular' I spoke with did one of two things (if not both):** clarify the points at which they cultivated their own, unique relationship to the island (outside the ones that their families have) and note that there are people within their own family who do not think Iona is all that special. Again, these two things taken together urge the same conclusion: that is important that individual **construct Iona's specialness 'for herself'**. We have seen this in various guises before: in the preference for the romantic gaze over the collective gaze - **the 'Romantic'**

⁴³³ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered*.

⁴³⁴ The phrase is from Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

here, is not just an aesthetic feature but an experiential feature: of being alone, independent, autonomous. We have seen this, too, in the body-engagements of visitors that help to construct, for instance, safety through autonomy, freedom and **mastery. Here, again, the opportunity to make ‘for themselves’ is the surest assurance that specialness could be ascribed.**

The data from Iona confirms Taves’ thesis that specialness arises out of a relationship between the individual and the collective, but modifies the relationship itself. I am suggesting that we see specialness on Iona becomes as a kind of **‘working consensus’**, where individual accounts of specialness may be constructed in relation to a wider and more loose acknowledgement of other accounts of specialness. The word **‘working’** here reflects two things: first, it serves to modify the term **‘consensus’** which can imply a closed and completed agreement. Iona’s specialness, I have shown repeatedly, **is not a ‘closed’ narrative - visitors are not at ‘end’ of a line of production in which the meaning and interpretation of the place is transferred from the tourist board, say, to the seasonal staff and tourist literature, to visitors. They can themselves create and pass on narratives of ‘specialness’ to other visitors, to seasonal staff, to islanders; they can create new tourist literature and testimony. Moreover, these narrative are not ‘complete’ in that they are shaped constantly through the visit: they are re-written, re-remembered, re-purposed, re-told. In this way, specialness - even if broadly agreed upon - is an ‘in progress’ category: visitors are not simply consumers or re-tellers of specialness, they are involved in the making of it. The second implication of the ‘working’ consensus takes us back to idea of relational identities, and the delicate relationship between leisure and work.**

Specialness as labour

That tourism is a leisure activity that stands in opposition to work is part of a standard formulation, seen in the work of John Urry and Erik Cohen. Boorstin writes: **‘the traveller, then, was working at something; the tourist was a pleasure-seeker.** The traveller was active; he went strenuously in search of people, of adventure, of experience. The tourist is passive; he expects interesting things to happen to him.’⁴³⁵ **Here we see clearly how the withholding of the category of ‘work’** diminishes the tourist, and it is the fact of labour that elevates the traveller. The **‘pilgrimage’, likewise, is** usually formulated as being an effort - physical and psychological - **something that stands as a point of distinction to ‘easy’ tourism. I** Chapter Two, we took up the Right Rev. Alexander Ewing’s commentary on Dr. Samuel Johnson’s visit to Iona in 1773 as a means of showing the importance of travel as a discourse on, among other things, religion (here, in the specific form of a resolute Protestant Christianity), masculinity and culture. The quotation read:

When we think of the distance he travelled, both by land and sea, and of the dangers to which the absence of modes of conveyance, or their insufficiency, exposed him - we must be permitted to say, that the pilgrimage of Dr. [Samuel] Johnson cannot be classed among offerings which cost nothing. Now the journey is easy, the facilities are great.

Right Rev. Alexander Ewing, D.C.L, (Bishop of Argyll and the Isles)⁴³⁶

Consider the basic argument of Rev. Ewing here: the dangers and difficulties of the travel undertaken by Johnson seem to add to its value. The distance that Johnson had to travel, the lack of convenient transport, the conditions of the sailing itself -

⁴³⁵ Boorstin, *The Image*, p.85.

⁴³⁶ *The Cathedral or Abbey Church of Iona and the Early Celtic Church and Mission of St. Columba* (Edinburgh: R Grant and Son, 1880) p. 64.

these carried with it certain risks which seemed to dignify the journey itself. When Ewing continues that the journey, in the time of his writing in 1880 was (relatively) easier, safer, more convenient, it carries with it an underlying implication: that the comparative lack of work or effort in more recent travels may erode the perceived **value of the travelling, because its 'costs' (physically, emotionally, perhaps even financially)** the traveller less to make them.

Notably, in the two pilgrimages offered by the Iona Community every Tuesday - the 'short' and the 'long' - the latter is advertised as being difficult and, in the week that I was present, this advertisement seemed to attract rather than deter potential pilgrims. Graham Monteith's study of the Iona Community noted the difficulties presented in reaching Iona (a two-hour journey, across a potentially choppy sea, at a return fare of nearly thirty pounds) created a 'heightened sense of pilgrimage'⁴³⁷. Chloe Chard has written about the assumption present in many narratives of the **Victorian Grand Tour that topographies of 'pleasure' merged easily with 'cultural benefit - or knowledge and improvements.'**⁴³⁸ And even the non-pilgrim, non-retreat goer, non-Grand Tour maker may argue that her journey involves regulated and organised work of some kind - **we have, for example, MacCanell's observation that the movement from industrial society to modern society has imbued *all* forms of tourism with concepts of labor and production; amusement parks, for example, fetishise a form of 'do-it-yourself work', and the act of sight-seeing may still contain elements of a 'work ethic'.**⁴³⁹ In each of these instances, work enhances the practice of travel, suggesting a dovetailing of two lines of analysis: first, the importance of

⁴³⁷ Monteith, W. Graham. 'Iona and Healing: A Discourse Analysis.' *Beyond New Age* edited by Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (2000): 105-117.

⁴³⁸ Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt*, p. 22.

⁴³⁹ MacCanell, *The Tourist*, p. 6.

the special as something created through different kinds of work and second, that **the idea of specialness as something to be ‘worked upon’ dignifies** the project of the visitor.

We have seen, for instance, the ways in which specialness is constructed by visitors - through effort, through interaction, through the application of imagination and sometimes, over a long period of practices of association. In other words, these are a kind of *labour* - the implication of specialness being constructed is that the visitor **works to construct it. In this way, the legitimacy of the visitor’s place is argued by associating specialness with labours. These ‘labours’ can take different forms - the collection of stones, walks to favourite places, the ‘investments’ made in the lives of others - whether visitors or islanders - but they are nonetheless work, and the consensus arrived upon is not received, but very literally worked upon.**

Consider the respondents we referred to previously: Darla - who had mentioned **that, unlike tourists, she ‘drops in to the energy of this place’, observing the life of animals on Iona, attending to lost lambs, writing stories about seagulls and oystercatchers.** Darla, like several other visitors on retreat, also expressed her time **on Iona as one of ‘self-work’: a designated time for introspection and what Hochschild might call ‘emotional labour’⁴⁴⁰.** Edward and Norma’s trip to Iona was marked by **a different kind of work: helping to organise Iona’s Golfing Tournament** - a tournament begun by a visitor to Iona and which is, to date, jointly run by visitors and a couple who reside on the island. The captaincy of the golf tournament was

⁴⁴⁰ Arlie Russell Hochschild, ‘Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure’ in *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551-575.

most usually taken up by visitors (two respondents in this study said that they had been captains in their time). The Carraghers noted the work that they have done on the island (with one of them having lead an Iona Community week in the past) and as part of the Iona Community more broadly. **Ben's work involved his** dissertation and the collection of rock samples; and at the time of the interview, Tariq had in his pocket a packet of seeds for trees that he had brought with him, for the especial purpose of planting in the **North End of the island ('I planted some** along the Community shop when I was here last time, but someone cut them **down.')** **These are all different kinds of 'work' to which we can add many more,** drawn from other respondents: visitors who had spent summers here working in one establishment or another, visitors who have, at various points, helped with the building work on particular houses (the Findhorn House being a particularly rich example), older visitors for whom walking and navigating the island itself is certainly a kind of physical labour. When we see the construction of specialness as a form of labour, we can appreciate the usefulness of labour as a means of establishing legitimacy.

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The case of the bins



Figure 8.4 | Bin Collection Schedule

On Iona, Monday evenings bring the sound of rolling wheels: bins hauled out of kitchens and sheds and to the front gates of houses. It is noisy, cans and tins bouncing as bins grate unevenly along a stony path. As with most weeks, not nearly enough has been fitted in them. The usual enquiries have been made: do the neighbours have place in theirs? Are the big bins at the jetty full, or could a couple of bottles be crammed in? By the time Tuesday morning comes, the street is lined **with the island's offerings** - waiting, as islanders wait too, for the trucks. In the wind, the cans inside the bags rattle and shake, making themselves known. No trucks come. More questions follow - have they missed the collection? Has anyone seen the trucks? The last ferry arrives. No trucks. Tuesday goes by, Wednesday goes by. The dregs of milk inside discarded plastic cartons have started to smell. Thursday, and the wind has forced bins opens, and bags to be blown off their tether. Occasionally, a stray egg carton escapes and lies strewn nearby. No trucks. People start wheeling their still-full bins in. Friday morning, the trucks arrive but

most of the bins are back in houses and most of the islanders are at work, unable to return in time for the collection. Next week, they will try again.

On a place twice removed from the mainland (and from the nearest dumping ground), drainage and disposal facilities are limited by geographic and logistical factors. The recreated scene above, for instances, describes a typical Tuesday on Iona - **that being Argyll and Bute council's designated day for the collection of household waste from Iona**. The council collects household waste every week but recyclables are picked up once every three weeks on a rotation system: one day for plastics, cans and cardboard and another for glass⁴⁴¹. Only one bin is allowed per household though there are bigger bins placed near the jetty and the village hall (the hotels and the pub also have bigger public bins, and a separate, year-long financial arrangement to have them emptied twice a week). The council circulates calendars that mark the dates of the collections. The image included above, taken in 2017, is indicative of what these look like, although the system has changed since (**'it's become worse, if possible'** as one islander said). The limit on the number of bins per household and the infrequency of the pick-ups places some pressure on the bins: a household of four, for instance, can accumulate enough cans, plastics and glass to fill a whole bag in the three assigned weeks, meaning that a missed collection can be a considerable inconvenience. Further, the complications of the garbage disposal system mirrors other complications in other waste-management systems. The drainage system for the island, for example, is very fragile and with septic tanks being prone to clogging due to the repeated flushing of improper materials down toilets. Likewise, the disposal of waste - especially large, household

⁴⁴¹ The recycling pattern has changed from the time I did my fieldwork. Glass is now collected on a on a three-week cycle but on Wednesdays.

waste - is difficult and expensive because there are limitations and rules to what the trucks can carry. **Many houses have an array of old 'junk'** - broken televisions, sofas, toasters, even dishwashers - discarded months ago but still to be taken over to the mainland. This is the larger system within which the weekly drama of the **bins needs to be understood. The collections are, by most islanders' reckoning, an 'event'.** Separate allowances are made for it: bins need to be taken out on the Monday and (if they are emptied), taken back on the Tuesday. There is social chat about bins, they are a common gripe in casual island conversation, and spark lively if heated discussion in Community Council meetings. Bins are not just important as part of a routinized system of waste disposal, they are an important part of the social and everyday experience of Iona.

'There is something uniquely offensive about trash; it is *out of place*' [emphasis in original], writes Fraser MacDonald, in his study of Scottish landscapes. MacDonald says:

'Rubbish will always be the greatest means of subverting the tourist imagination in the Highlands and, indeed, one might even argue that litter could have a useful role in rural political practice in the same way that graffiti is used in the city: The washed up squeeze-bottle on that beach, the remains of a dead car or the wind-strewn wreckage of an ex-washing machine become inverted icons of modernity, reminders that Highland people have the same **materialistic concerns as those from the tourists' city. The fact that** islanders chose for themselves a new car in the same way that the tourist chose a holiday disrupts the image of an other-worldly, **childlike peasant.'**⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² Fraser MacDonald, 'The Scottish Highlands as Spectacle' in *Tourism: Between place and performance* 54 (2002): p. 67-68.

In fact, the three times that bins or waste-disposal came up in my interviews, was as a point of dissatisfaction expressed by visitors: about how out-of-place bins looked at the jetty, or about the sight of a street lined with an array of wheely bins. Most of the time, no one mentioned them at all. This is not a surprising revelation in itself: as visitors on holiday, when there are beaches, and ruins, and green hills to explore, it not inconceivable that visitors choose not to fixate their attention on **Iona's garbage**-disposal facilities. In the discussion on specialness as a selective narrative, then, bins give us a unique window into this selectiveness. Bins are essential to Iona as a material home for its islanders but they are absent in symbolic home-ness of Iona. They highlight a key tension in the relationship between the material and the symbolic that has so far been explored, because they allow us to see where the symbolic world of Iona-as-home rubs up uncomfortably with material realities of Iona-as-home. The visitor imaginary of Iona as home, for instance, does not need to take in to account how waste will be disposed of, but the realities of living on the island certainly do. Similarly, symbolic homes are more conveniently built (and more easily dismantled) than the material homes on Iona. And by making these symbolic homes, visitors can engage with imaginative exercises of dwelling while being protected from the sometimes inconvenient and difficult necessities that come with being resident on Iona. But perhaps here is the poignancy of the visitor exercises of home-making: that the visible presence of island houses, cars, telegraph poles and bins disrupt not simply the frames of specialness that visitors construct but also the fantasy of Iona as home. Seen in this light, these marks of habitation serve as reminders of the presence of a resident population in contrast **to visitors' own position: as** transient and mobile - at home-but-not-home. In this way, we can see the contested nature of place on Iona and its multivalence as a necessary *condition* for the articulations of specialness.

To that extent perhaps we can apply a similar critique to specialness itself. A particularly striking comment from one islander to me in an informal conversation **about my research was that other visitors finding in Iona a specialness ‘vindicated’** her own decision to make her life here. It added value to her own life, by making the place in which she lived in more valuable. My suggestion here is: if residence on the island is a privilege that islanders alone have, the creation of narratives of specialness about Iona is perhaps the privilege of visitors to the place. Another islander made a contrastive comment: that it sometimes took a visitor for him to remember how special Iona was: to be able to see the island through the eyes of a **visitor. A third commented, more wryly, ‘of course they think it’s special. They don’t need to take the bins out!’**

* * * *

This chapter has gathered the various threads that have been unravelled in the study of specialness so far: its relationality, interactivity, participatory-ness and its complexity. It has put these to use by showing how visitors use the narrative of specialness as a means of arriving, mapping, building and inhabiting the island of Iona. In this way, **the ‘joint action’ of story-telling**, the ideas of safety, connectedness, the sense of being out-of-time, the importance of gazing as a means **of uncovering the hidden and possession as a means legitimating one’s place** - all come together in the idea of Iona as a home for its visitors. This, then, is one function of specialness: as a means of making homes. The latter half of this chapter, then, has produced an argument to demonstrate the importance of these acts of home-making. It has placed these visitor acts within two contexts: the situational

context of visitors as transient subjects and the spatial context of Iona as a multivalent site. It shows how specialness can arise from the productive condition of liminality and how it help to bridge the transience of the visitors through the making of homes. Further, it shows how the construction of specialness can help to dignify travel and legitimise the place of the visitors through recourse to the dynamic between leisure and work. **It is a means of marking 'place'** - both the place of Iona and their own position in it. Deeming Iona as special and presenting the construction of specialness as visitor labour, then, helps visitors to simultaneously produce a working consensus on Iona while cementing their own distinct roles within this story.

9. Conclusion

It might seem strange that an enquiry that began with an expansive view of a **‘special’ place and its rich and imaginative history ended with discussing the banal matter of garbage disposal.** This is, however, a reflection of a theme that has come up repeatedly in this work so far: **that of differentiation, of being ‘set apart’.** For the **‘special’ to exist as a sensible epithet in the visitor narrative, visitors themselves must identify, implicitly or explicitly, that which is *unspecial* or less special.** This could be bins, houses, **or the experiences of other visitors who ‘don’t get it’.** In this way, the special is necessarily set apart from that which is not special.

The conclusion begins by teasing **this idea of ‘setting apart’.** It shows how, in many instances, Iona cannot really be **‘set apart’ from other islands, or from wider Scottish or British contexts.** This sense of Iona being *unspecial* challenges the discussion on specialness that has been applied to it so far. The next section of the conclusion presents a response to this tension by returning to the theoretical, conceptual and methodological contributions that this work has thrown up. It shows how the study of specialness as articulated by visitors to Iona can have both a site-specific value, as well as be applied more broadly to other contexts. I, then, bring this thesis to a close by suggesting ways in which this research and its various **‘moving parts’ can be** taking outside the field-site of Iona, and the contexts in which this enquiry can be especially fruitful.

Iona in Context



Figure 9.1 | Promotional Image, National Trust for Scotland website

Iona is not the smallest Scottish island: Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides, and some of the islands that make up the Shetland and Orkneys archipelago are smaller in area. It is neither the most populous inhabited island (that would be Lewis and Harris) nor the least (two islands close to Iona, Gometra and Erraid, have considerably smaller resident populations)⁴⁴³. It was not the first place in Scotland upon which Christianity took root: that would be Whithorn, under St. Ninian in 498 AD. **Iona's** famed Lewisian Gneiss rocks - noted for being the oldest in Britain- take their name from another island with which they are associated and where they are still found: Harris and Lewis. The island of Incholm in the Firth of Forth also has a prominent association to monastic life; and the endangered corncrake that nests on Iona also nests on Mull. In fact, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (the RSPB) mentions on their website that the best places to spot corncrakes are the Western

⁴⁴³ According to data from the National Records of Scotland 2013, Lewis and Harris: 87,251; Iona: 177; Gometra: 2; Erraid: 6.

Isles, and the island of Coll, in the inner Hebrides. If the Askernish golf course on South Uist is often singled out for being historic and exceptionally beautiful,⁴⁴⁴ the island of Eigg is often singled out for its environmental agenda⁴⁴⁵ (it was the first Scottish island to get its energy entirely from wind turbines) and its ownership structure⁴⁴⁶ (a community buyout from the National Trust, a model that was later followed by islands like Gigha⁴⁴⁷ and, more recently, Canna⁴⁴⁸). Arran has frequently been named ‘Scotland in Miniature’⁴⁴⁹; Islay is famous for its whisky; Skye is the most popular with visitors⁴⁵⁰; The Fair Isle, between mainland Shetland and Orkney, is the likeliest candidate for being the most remote.⁴⁵¹

Many of the features of island life to be found on Iona are widely prevalent. Islands have often been seen as economically vulnerable places because of their low

⁴⁴⁴ “The most natural links course in the world’, as a Golfing Website describes it. See <http://www.golftoday.co.uk/travel/features/2010/highlands_and_islands.html>

⁴⁴⁵ Dixe Wills, “Eigg, Britain’s most eco-friendly island” *The Guardian* (May 29, 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/may/29/eigg-island-scotland-cycling-walking-kayaking>>

⁴⁴⁶ For Eigg, this was on 27 June 1998. See Patrick Barkham, “This Island is Not For Sale: How Eigg Fought Back” (September 26, 2001) <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/sep/26/this-island-is-not-for-sale-how-eigg-fought-back>>

⁴⁴⁷ For Gigha, see the website of the Scottish Government, available at <<https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20170116072836/http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/empowerment/casestudies/buyout>> Although, in an interesting development, the Heritage Trust is reportedly considering a return to private ownership. See BBC Scotland, “It’s not utopia: 16 years on from when the community took control of the tiny Isle of Gigha, (16 February 2018), <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/qhKdGhMnWIBQF70CBp2KkS/it-s-not-utopia-16-years-on-from-when-the-community-took-control-of-the-tiny-isle-of-gigha-off-scotland-s-west-coast>>

⁴⁴⁸ Canna, which is owned by the National Trust at the time of writing, is to soon be handed over to the island community. See Mike Wade, “National Trust gives island of Canna’s 15 residents control of their own destiny” *The Times* (December 29, 2017) <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/national-trust-gives-island-of-cannas-15-residents-control-of-their-own-destiny-v20kvrksv>>

⁴⁴⁹ See the website Scotland Welcomes You, at <<http://scotlandwelcomesyou.com/the-isle-of-arran/>>

⁴⁵⁰ James Shaw, “Is Skye Reaching the Limit for Tourists?” *BBC News* (9 August 2017) <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-40874488>>

⁴⁵¹ See Fair Isle, at <<http://www.fairisle.org.uk/about-the-isle.html>>

industrial capital and limited commodity-production means, remoteness from domestic markets, higher cost of export and import and a limited labour pool⁴⁵². Iona shares the concerns of other island communities in developing sustainable enterprise and deriving income from island produce⁴⁵³. **Like other islands, Iona's residents tend to practice occupational pluralism whereby 'islanders engage in a range of activities to "tap into" whatever economic opportunities are available'**⁴⁵⁴. In keeping with what Danson refers to as 'portfolio entrepreneurship' in which individuals and social enterprises have multiple jobs and income sources⁴⁵⁵, many of Iona's islanders have more than one job in the summer season, driven by the tourist economy. **Iona's tourist season echoes Scotland's** in general, with a high rate of visiting from May until October, peaking in July and August⁴⁵⁶. The promotional image of St. Kilda at the start of this section was taken from the website of the National Trust for Scotland which owns both St. Kilda and Iona⁴⁵⁷: a reminder that the language of specialness is not limited to Iona. One respondent, Euan, had said about Iona that **'yeah, it's special but there are lots of other places that are special to me too. I don't fetishise it or anything'**. In his phrasing, Euan brings to light one key tension in discussing specialness: a fetishizing of the object itself. How can we study the narrative of Iona as an exceptional place without exceptionalising Iona?

⁴⁵² Atkins et al, 2000; Crowards, 2000.

⁴⁵³ Lino Briguglio, "Small Island Developing States and their Economic Vulnerabilities" *World Development* 23, no. 9 (1995): 1615-1632; JP Atkins, SA Mazzi and CD Easter, "Commonwealth Vulnerability Index for Developing Countries: The Position of Small States" *Economic Paper, No. 40, Commonwealth Secretariat (2000)*; Tom Crowards, "Comparative Vulnerability to Natural Disasters in the Caribbean" *Staff Working Paper No. 1/00, Caribbean Development Bank (2000)*.

⁴⁵⁴ Stephen Royle, *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity* (Routledge, 2001), p. 62.

⁴⁵⁵ Mike Danson and Kathryn Burnett, "Entrepreneurship and enterprise on islands" in C Henry and G McElwee (eds), *Exploring Rural Enterprise: New Perspectives on Research, Policy and Practice: Contemporary Issues in Entrepreneurship Research*, (London: Emerald Group Publishing, 2014), Vol. 4, pp. 151-174

⁴⁵⁶ **Tourism in Scotland's Regions report, 2016, pp. 19- 23.**

⁴⁵⁷ Along with St. Kilda and Iona, the National Trust Scotland also owns the Fair Isle, Staffa, Unst, Yell, as well as numerous other properties across Scotland.

What does it mean to say that Iona is ‘special’?

Here, we can return to the work of Ann Taves. Taves divides the categories of things that tend to be deemed special into two categories: things that are unusual, weird, strange (the anomalous) or those that are perfect, exemplary, the best of their kind (the ideal).⁴⁵⁸ Curiously, Iona lends itself to be seen as an **‘ideal’** (we have seen, for instance, Ulrich’s lauding of Iona as ‘Eden’ in Chapter Seven) as well as an **‘anomaly’** (the idea, for instance, of it being a **‘thin place’** where the natural order of things - a separation between two worlds - is reversed). But how can it be ideal if idyllic-ness is a feature that is regularly ascribed to islands at large?⁴⁵⁹ Here, we have an instance of an island that has both been framed as an ideal thing (the best of its kind) as well as an anomaly (the only one of its kind). The explanation of how this coincidence can occur **can add to Taves’ work** which does not at present address the relationship *between* ideal and anomalous things. It can also clarify why the **particular ‘specialness’** *on* Iona, is also particular *to* it.

The case of Iona, I am arguing, gives us a particular instance of specialness: as a **‘heightened’ concept**. Here, I am arguing that the interaction between specialness as a visitor narrative, Iona as a place with a dizzying array of material and **metaphorical ‘realities’** and the visitor as a transient subject come together to produce parallel processes of **‘set-apartness’**. **We have seen some of the processes** before: in the ways in which visitors orient themselves within particular stories of

⁴⁵⁸ Taves, *Religious Experience*, pp. 34-38.

⁴⁵⁹ **‘The 30 most idyllic islands on earth’**: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/beach-holidays/winter-sun-best-tropical-islands/>, 20.10.2017 [28.02.2018]

the island (Chapter 5), in the co-construction of Iona as ‘safe’, ‘connectedness’ and ‘out of time’ in relation to the mainland (Chapter 6), by the setting apart of some places and gazes from others (Chapter 7), through differentiating oneself from other visitors (Chapter 8). My argument is that these different kinds of ‘set apart’ things come together as layers which creates a heightened category of the special.

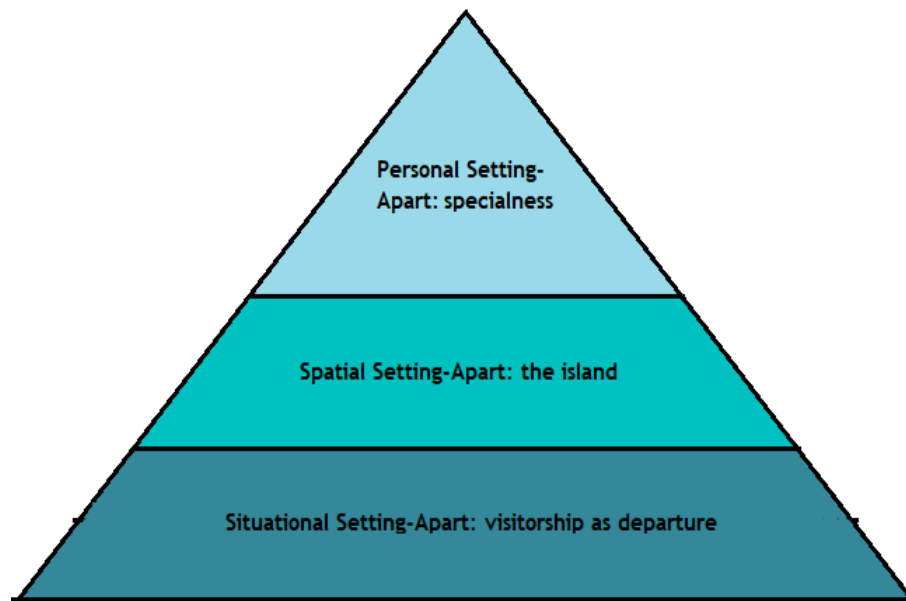


Figure 9.2 | The ‘heightening’ of specialness

Consider, for instance, the visitor observation that Iona is ‘out of time’. This represents a co-incidence of: visitor time as seen as separate from everyday, routinized time; islands being interpreted as timeless or eternal places; Iona being **seen as the preserve of ‘Iona time’**; the recognition that Iona is *not* out-of-time for the visitors rushing, at this moment, to take the ferry that would take them home; the immediate luxury of being able to, say, lie down on a beach for hours at a stretch. My argument, simply, is that the co-incidence (or even ‘synchronicity’) of these different kinds of differentiation builds the potency of the particular feeling

of ‘out-of-time’-ness. We can take another example: **Sabine’s feeling of wonderment and connection to Iona’s Nunnery, described in Chapter Three and Chapter Five.** Going back to that feeling of connection, we can see how the effect of her situational setting (as a visitor), her spatial setting (in a ruined Nunnery on an island with a regularly-mentioned ‘feminine energy’) and her personal setting (as a self-identifying gay, female, atheist) coincide to heighten her experience. In fact, some visitors used the word ‘heightening’ themselves to describe their experience of Iona - on account of which I have used it here. More commonly, many visitors referred to a specific sense of intensity that defined some of their experiences on Iona. ‘Blue seems blue-er here’, as a respondent said. Another told me that she fell in love ‘more deeply here than anywhere else’. Roger, whom we have met before, spoke of what it felt like to walk on the stony-road at night in the pitch black with no street lights to light the way, said that she felt ‘for the first time, at least on Iona, fear. You know, Real fear. As though there was something...dangerous. I can’t explain it, but it was so vivid.’

Roger’s comment resonates with what Stephen Greenblatt would describe as the affect of a ‘wonder’: a ‘localized exception’, which has the power to ‘stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness’⁴⁶⁰. Referencing Greenblatt’s work in her own discussion of travel writing, Chloe Chard identifies ‘intensification’ as a powerful rhetorical device used by writers to describe new places. Specifically, she sees intensified descriptions as a way for travellers to negotiate the exotic by heightening what was familiar. Writing, for instance, that ‘travellers, in other words, regularly claim that, while the warm South [of Europe]

⁴⁶⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder” *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1990, p. 170.

incorporates many features that are found in England and France, it displays these in an intensified form⁴⁶¹, Chard gives us a way of understanding how places can be described as both unique and familiar, by emphasising differences in degrees rather **than of kind. When Roger says that he felt ‘real fear’ on Iona, for instance, he is** referring both to the experience of the familiar (fear as an emotion he has felt in the past) and the novel (the fear that he felt on his walk on the stony road on Iona).

Iona is not the sole ‘site’ on which specialness can be constructed by visitors; it is not the only place where visitors can feel ‘safe’, or ‘connected’ or ‘out of time’. **But Chard’s application of intensification gives us a way** to understand how the experience on Iona, even though it contains elements of the familiar, can **nonetheless be ‘set apart’ as special through** a process of heightening. How can the **same place be both ‘novel’ and ‘familiar’, ‘home’ and ‘away’?** In a similar vein, how can the **experience of lying still on a beach for an hour at a time be ‘special’** if the visitor has done it before, or does this regularly? The previous chapter has given us one way to answer this: through the transformation of place and relationships to it brought about by home-making. The use and value of specialness as a means of home-making and place-marking allows visitors to navigate and inhabited previously unfamiliar place. By engaging with stories of a place and with other visitors, through **acts like gazing, running, collecting stones, an ‘away’ place can become home, and** the novel can co-exist with the familiar. **However, in the process of ‘heightening’** we can see a parallel and accompanying process that completes the picture. If home-making shows the domestication of the exotic, heightening exoticises the

⁴⁶¹ Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour*, p. 48.

familiar. The heightened effect of the various layers involved with visitorship on Iona can intensify familiar experiences, making them seem strange and powerful. In this way, the case of Iona demonstrates different possibilities with regard to specialness. First, it shows that while narratives of specialness do often to things deemed ideal or anomalous (as Taves suggested) it can also emerge from narratives where ideal things or anomalous things are contested, or even missing. Second, it shows that specialness as an ascription can itself *create* ideal and anomalous things through processes of heightening. Third, it demonstrates that even if the framework of specialness is carried to other sites, it can still be studied for its situational significance and context-specific meanings.

* * * *

This thesis has, in steps, presented a context, challenge and a solution: the context **within which places are studied as sites of ‘religion and tourism’**, the challenge of applying this framework to polyvocal sites such as Iona, and a solution in the form of the expanded framework of specialness. At the start of this work, I offered a three-fold account of the contribution that this thesis can make to the field of religion and tourism: conceptual, theoretical and methodological. We can return to these now, by way of closing our enquiry.

Conceptual Contribution

This thesis’ chief conceptual contribution has been its building of a site-specific understanding of specialness by devising an applicable and malleable ‘framework’ of specialness. The material in Chapters Five through Eight have worked in detail to

realise different aspects of the concept of specialness and demonstrated, I hope, their value in explaining the complex site of Iona. **The thesis has also ‘spoken back’** to the original conceptualisation that influenced its choice of vocabulary: the work of Ann Taves. It has taken forward **Taves’ work in a number of ways: using her idea of the ‘generic net’ to capture the emic understandings of Iona’s specialness,** showing how her argument about the need to diffuse the strict boundaries of the **‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ is applicable to Iona,** nuancing her work on the role of the collective in forming complex ascriptions, and on the presence of ideal and anomalous things in the construction of the special. In this section, then, I will turn my attention to **the broader ‘framework’ of specialness devised in the ‘moving parts’ of the thesis,** and show how they can be useful in provoking research.

The ‘moving parts’ of specialness listed in this thesis were: form, content, process and function. This division is, to some extent, porous (the form of the story, for instance, influences the dramatism of the product of specialness). And yet, this structuring has allowed us to parse a very complex concept and to tackle it from a number of different directions. As this thesis has shown, the special can carry quite **a lot of conceptual weight: by virtue of containing a ‘toolbox’ of useful moving parts,** and through being understood both through function - its role in constructing and legitimising relationships - and substance - an emic account of its constituent elements. Second, it should underline the fact that the special is not a stable, ontological category. While the special on Iona can certainly be broken down to particular component parts (like safety) and can be associated with particular acts (like collecting stones), the special in another place may well look very different. **The benefit of the ‘moving parts’ framework is that** it can be used for comparative

studies without reifying or stabilising its central conception. Here, I am proposing two routes for this kind of work.

Route One | New, in-depth ethnographic work on ‘specialness’

Glastonbury has been described in terms similar to Iona, as **‘a holy or special place which has attracted pilgrims and tourists for centuries’**⁴⁶². Like Iona, the English town has a long history of occupation, with evidence of pre-historic settlement. Like Iona, it has a bedrock of Christianity, primarily because of being connected with St. Joseph of Arimathea, who was said to have carried the Holy Grail to Britain. Like Iona, Glastonbury has been associated with Druidism and Celticity, wider New Age movements and paranormal sightings like UFOs and crop circles. It also receives **Sufis, Buddhists, Bahai’i, those associated with the ‘Hare Krishna’ movement. Like** Iona, it shows complexity in its various infrastructures with the National Trust, Bath and Wells Diocesan, the local community and the Chalice Well Trust as its various stakeholders. Even the language used to describe Glastonbury has striking resonance to the language used to describe Iona: Bowman notes that its atmosphere has been **described as ‘peculiar, magical, powerful, disturbing, peaceful’**⁴⁶³, a place where **‘this world and the other world meet’**⁴⁶⁴. Two of my own respondents on Iona mentioned Glastonbury as a place that reminded them of Iona (**‘but Glastonbury is bigger and busier, of course’** one of them said). The **‘triangle of light’** that the Findhorn Foundation meditates on in Iona runs through Findhorn, Iona and

⁴⁶² The following summary has been written by assimilating the work of Marion Bowman on Glastonbury in Bowman, *Drawn to Glastonbury*, pp. 30-46 and **‘Going with the Flow: Contemporary Pilgrimage in Glastonbury**. Peter Jan Margry (ed.). *Shrines and Pilgrimage in the Modern World: New Itineraries into the Sacred*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 241-280.

⁴⁶³ Bowman, *Drawn to Glastonbury*, p. 41.

⁴⁶⁴ Bowman, *Drawn to Glastonbury*, p. 30.

Glastonbury, placing the three in a closed circuit of powerful and special places in Britain. The town is so regularly a site for ‘home-making’ that there is a specific term for the people who, while coming to Glastonbury for spiritual reasons, later settle there because of a feeling of belonging: Avalonians. Finally, Glastonbury Tor, in a curious quirk, was once an island when the Somerset levels were covered by the sea.

How might specialness work in a site like Glastonbury? Would stories serve a similar purpose there? What would the ‘emic’ register of specialness on Glastonbury look like? Are there a clutch of site-specific actions which visitors do on Glastonbury (a parallel to, say, the collection of stones in Iona or the running on island beaches and roads) which can clarify how body-engagements produce place? Can busier and larger places like Glastonbury challenge the importance of the idea of ‘intimacy’ that is so key to the construction of Iona as personal and as home? Can the correlation between multivalent sites and the potential to create a ‘heightened’ category of specialness be confirmed by studying Glastonbury? Iona, this conclusion has stated, is not the only place that manages a reputation for being touristic and (variously) holy, spiritual, religion and so on. The first route of further study that I am proposing, therefore, is the application of the framework of specialness devised here to other sites that have been ‘deemed’ to be one or more of the ascriptions associated with ‘specialness’. Glastonbury, here, serves as one possible site but there are many more: Lindisfarne, Jerusalem, The Golden Temple in India, Uluru in Australia and so on. The illustration below suggests four research questions that can help to translate the moving parts framework to such sites.

Applying Form

Question: What is an academically rich and logistically viable form in which to study the **‘specialness’ of this site?**

Applying Content

Question: What site-**specific cluster of terms** does the **‘specialness’ of this site** generate?

Applying Process

Question: What are significant actions of visitors on-the-ground that can be Identified in the site?

Applying Function

Question: **What structural value** does this **‘specialness’** have in the site?

Route Two | Reframing existing work in Religion and Tourism

Specialness, this thesis has shown, can bring together terms like **‘religion’**, **‘tourism’** and **‘heritage’** and **‘magic’**. The second route for using the material in this thesis for wider research, then, is to harness its potential for engaging with a wide variety of texts and cases across different fields. Here, I am suggesting that the framework devised does not need to be adopted whole-heartedly as with the in-depth ethnographic model described above. Instead, it can be used fruitfully on *existing* studies in the field of religion, tourism, pilgrimage, heritage to name a few to generate new insights. ‘The illustration below highlights how each individual **‘moving part’ can be used**, separate to each other, and deployed to bring in existing work into a wider discussion on specialness.

Applying Form

Question: To what extent is story-telling an exercise in the construction of place?

Applications: Travellers on the Camino to Santiago de Compostela⁴⁶⁵; Forms of speech in travel encounters⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁵ Tiina Sepp, ‘Stories of Santiago Pilgrims: tradition through creativity’ in Bowman and Valk (eds.), *Vernacular Religion*, pp. 301-327.

⁴⁶⁶ Greenblatt, ‘Resonance and Wonder’

Applying Content

Question: **To what extent does the sense of being ‘out-of-time’ drive** tourism?

Applications: ‘Heritage’ as a renegotiation of the modern and the historic⁴⁶⁷;

Tropes of timelessness in the presentation of Scotland⁴⁶⁸

Applying Process

Question: To what extent is walking a means of mapping and inhabiting place?

Applications: Labyrinths as grounded spiritual practice⁴⁶⁹; The formation of **womens’ walking groups** as a tactic to reclaim lost space⁴⁷⁰

Applying Function

Function: To what extent does liminality spur the production of new forms?

⁴⁶⁷ Sharon MacDonald, ‘**A People’s Story: Heritage, Identity and Authenticity**’ in Rojek and Urry (eds.) *Touring Cultures*

⁴⁶⁸ John and Margaret Gold, *Imagining Scotland*

⁴⁶⁹ Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* (London: Penguin, 1996).

⁴⁷⁰ Österlund-Pötzsch, ‘**Pedestrian Art**’

Applications: Religion as a means to **‘make homes and cross boundaries’**⁴⁷¹,
 Cultural performances in marginal places⁴⁷².

In these examples, the arguments made in the individual chapters in this thesis have each been distilled to one (possible) research question. **The chapter on ‘form’ has been distilled to the relationship between the story as a unit of articulation and the place; the chapter on ‘function’ has been distilled to its barest contention that the transience of visitorship (that is, liminality) creates the conditions for visitor constructions of narratives of belonging and home - and specialness (the creation of new forms).** The suggested applications, then, refer to specific empirical and, on occasion, theoretical work which asks similar questions. My recommendation is that the listed works (and others besides) be studied to see the ways in which these works have understood this relationship. These lessons can then be used to modify, nuance and bolster the on-going exploration of the special. For instance, can the way in which heritage tourism works in Skye feed into the possible link between the **‘out of time’ and the special?** Can we see, in the attempt of women in Helsinki to reclaim urban space through acts of walking, a process similar to the way in which visitors on Iona inscribe their place through roaming the island? This rather common-sense exercise can, on the one hand, allow us to include existing work across fields in the discussion on specialness. More significantly, it can perhaps render more

⁴⁷¹ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*

⁴⁷² Jean Haskell Speer, **‘Performance as Meaning in a Mountain Folktale’** in Elizabeth C. Fine and Jean Haskell Speer (eds.) *Performance, Culture, and Identity* (Praeger: West Port, Connecticut, 1992), pp. 117-134.

diffuse - or even obsolete - some of the arbitrary distinctions made between **'sacred spaces'** and **'profane spaces'** and **'pilgrimage'** and **'tourism'**.

Theoretical Contribution

The interdisciplinary nature of the thesis and its broad scope means that this thesis challenges some prominent theoretical positions in the field: the idea of an abstract and unpopulated **'space'** and the viewing of the tourist (or the visitor) as predominantly a consuming subject. There are other concepts too that are variously challenged in this work: the usefulness and applicability of the **'sacred'**, the emphasis on the distinction between **'tourist'** and **'pilgrim'** in the study of tourism. By the same token, it defends and in some cases re-purposes other influential theoretical contributions: John Urry's work on the tourist **'gaze'**, Pierre Bourdieu's formulation of capital (specifically social, cultural and linguistic capital), Julia Harrison's conception of tourist intimacy, David McCrone's notes on the weight of **'heritage'** in contemporary travel, Coleman and Eade's emphasis that travel is an engagement of the body.

If this thesis' most fundamental points of departure from existing scholarship are its emphasis on the tourist producer and its de-emphasising of **'religion'** as a distinct sphere in a working tourist site, the most crucial tension it raises by its conclusion is the tension between work and leisure. It teases at this relationship at various points: showing how leisure can both be understood as unproductive and productive, how the attachment of **'effort'** to travel has traditionally been seen to dignify it, and how the line between **'work'** and **'play'** is not always evident in visitorship. This

is where specialness, again, becomes useful. In the first, it allows us to see the nature and role of visitor work in a fieldwork site. Each of the strands in this thesis require visitor labours: imaginative, discursive, corporeal efforts of movement, navigation, place-making. This is the visitor as agent and producer of specialness. And yet, the material in this thesis leaves us with two (related) stumbling blocks: the idea of the invisibility of hidden labour and the tension between the construction of specialness by the visitor and its simultaneous ascription to an outside agent.

Consider, for instance, the observation made in Chapter Seven that the visitor gaze, by prioritising solitude and romance, often ignores the presence of other visitors. The clearest expression of this idea on Iona, however, is that for some visitors and/or in some instances, visitors may view specialness as a value that exists apart from them: as an attribute of Iona itself. We have seen instances of this in Chapter Six, **in the idea that Iona is a ‘thin’ place with the promise of encounters with celestial beings, with these encounters themselves being part of Iona’s specialness. One respondent said, of the Abbey, that it was ‘alive’, that it felt, not like a dead ruin or a disused church, but a place that was living and thriving; another commented on being aware of the ‘pulse’ and ‘beat’ of the island, speaking of it like an organism, and recognising what the island can *do* to people. We can recall, for instance, Vayu’s comment on how the island itself nurtures her, or Beatrice’s note that ‘there are no coincidences on Iona’, as though the island itself is sentient, or knowing, exerting a certain agency over its respondents. ‘I see it as gifting’, Norman said to me, when describing some highlights of his holiday on Iona, ‘it’s Iona’s gift.’ Speaking of his association with Iona at a difficult time in his life**

another respondent told me, ‘I just came to Iona and said, do what you need to do’, making it clear to me that the ‘you’ was directed at the island itself. This clutch of comments shows that even though this thesis theorises specialness as a visitor construction, for at least some of Iona’s visitors, its specialness is experienced as being *not* constructed.

We had taken up **ideas of visibility and invisibility involved in the visitor ‘gaze’** taken up in Chapter Seven. There, I suggested that on Iona, as in most places of hospitality, there is a challenge of doing work, while hiding the mechanics of effort. **The ‘backstage’ to use Erving Goffman’s formulation** (Staff quarters, busy kitchens, bin collection rotas) needs to be cloaked, while still making sure that the work required (changing sheets, preparing meals, collecting waste) goes on smoothly. This, for instance, is why the selectiveness of the special can be sustained: Iona is **not ‘out of time’ for the hotel manager or the shop assistant, but through the cloaking of such ‘back regions’, the visitor sense of not being bound by clock time** can be cultivated. In this way, the labours involved with everyday work on Iona are present but hidden from the gaze of the visitor. But what if we see visitors not simply as the recipients of labours but as the *performers* of labours? If we see the **ascription of specialness as visitor ‘work’, as the previous chapter has argued we should**, then we are left with a curious paradox: that while visitors work to create Iona’s specialness, many routinely render invisible their own role in this process. In fact, this is a process that Taves herself anticipates in her work. She writes about specialness that,

‘people recognise and respond to these qualities as to something that exists apart from themselves, even when they are manifest through their own bodies...they can search for them, cultivate them, recognise them, respond to them, and attribute causality to

them in a passive sense, without viewing themselves as creating them.’⁴⁷³

John Eade’s superb study of London gives us a way to address Taves’ point about specialness as (seen to be) externalised and its implications when applied to specific places. He notes the tendency to personify places, for example, by according a distinctive identity to places by likening them to people (we can, for instance, think of Cuba being seen as ‘wild’ or Delhi being seen as ‘dangerous’, or London being seen as a ‘city that never sleeps’). This, for him, is a kind of reification: seeing places as possessing qualities independent of the actions of the people who occupy them. He cautions that, in our search for the ‘essential’ qualities of a place, that we do not forget the importance of human activity in producing and continuing these qualities⁴⁷⁴.

Eade’s critique is, if anything, political. He notes that these reified ideas of place are ‘partly a fiction’ but they are a necessary and possibly ideological fiction that creates over-arching and seemingly coherent identities. In this way, seeing places as containing essential properties outside the realm of human activity can serve to undervalue the very real effort of the people involved with the care of that place. His alternative reading is that places ‘are constructed through social, cultural, political, and economic processes’. ‘London and Londoners are producers - and continue to be produced’, reminding us that to reify places is to undervalue, or even erase, the labour it takes to maintain particular meanings of places. There is almost something of Marx’s understanding of alienation in John Eade’s description:

⁴⁷³ Taves, *Religious Experience*, p. 40

⁴⁷⁴ John Eade, *Placing London: From Imperial Capital to Global City* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), p. 5.

the idea that it is the alienation between worker and product (the fruit of labour) that creates the conditions for religion. It is an idea that Marx shaped in relation to **Feuerbach's work** in the *Essence of Christianity*, where Feuerbach posited a dual process of externalisation (when people attribute their own essence and action to an external being), followed by internalisation (where people accept the domination of this being, that they themselves have constructed)⁴⁷⁵. **Eade's writing** on London, in a similar light, recognises that the reification or personification of places brings with it the danger that the agents involved with the construction of those places be forgotten. His own attention to class relations means that he was **speaking, in particular, of the efforts of London's working class**. However, the case of Iona gives us an interesting instance where visitors, through the attribution of agency to the island, tread the possibility of writing out their own role in the construction of its specialness.

Is this thesis, then, a project of demystification? It is not. For one thing, its attention to the liveliness of place and the importance of relationality within place means that it has recognised, at various points, the affective nature of the relationship **between people and places**. The discussion on Iona as 'safe from' / 'safe to' showed, for instance, that while it is visitors' experiences on the island that help them to code it as 'safe', Iona's perceived safety can also influence certain kinds of visitor behaviour (their willingness to leave bags unattended or certain kinds of risk-taking on hikes). **The mythical travellers that populate Iona's places (chapter 5) were** shown to become important to its perception as connected (chapter 6). Likewise, the idea of heightening itself recognises that there are different layers of the special

⁴⁷⁵ Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1957), pp. 29-30.

that work in tandem: **Cath's understanding, for instance, that when she comes to Iona with a challenge, she merely tries to be open to possibilities and 'lets the island work its magic'. In these ways,** this thesis can readily acknowledge and, to some extent, even explain why, for at least some visitors on Iona, its specialness exists as a quality in which they have no part. However, by showing the value of hidden things as mediating the visible and invisible layers of Iona, by positing specialness **as an 'open secret' or a 'working consensus' which nonetheless requires autonomy and agency,** this thesis justifies its **emphasis on visitor agency.** Iona's long history of visitorship and reputation for specialness are coeval: the latter would not exist had the former not existed.

Whether or not Iona is 'really' special (that is, according to some objective criterion) was never the driving question of this thesis. I have, for instance, consistently emphasised the problems with the way the concept of reality has been applied in tourist site. However, recognising that the contemporary and continued reputation of Iona as special is, at least in part, a visitor construction, is a way of taking seriously the power of the metaphorical and symbolic, the labours involved in the production of place, and the entangled relationship between work in the context of leisure.

* * * *

Methodological Contribution

This thesis was built using the fieldwork methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and photographic data. It also employed a site-specific method of data collection that was devised particularly to

account for the ‘in-motion’ and immersive nature of this research. This format - the walking interview - has been described in Chapter Three. Its particular benefits - of creating a dynamic mode of conversation, of provoking interaction with a variety of places, of handing over considerable power and room to the respondent herself - have been reflected in the richness of the data presented in this thesis.

This is not to say that the method itself does not have flaws and blind-spots. My research design implicitly favoured longer-stay visitors owing to the length of time required for the interviews. Most day-**long visitors’** trips to Iona last approximately two or two and a half hours (the hours between 12 and 2.30 are busiest) only one such visitor was part of the long-form data set. Second, while movement and variation are important were important for this specific project, they may not be as central to a project that investigates, say, the textual understandings of Iona or the particular meanings **of the Iona Heritage Centre. In this way, this thesis’** implicit push for including a breadth of data may also have prevented any one space on the island - the Village Hall, the North End, the machair - from being studied in detail. Nonetheless, I believe **that the ‘walking interview’ format can and should be utilised** in other sites and for other projects that require rich data and sensory engagement. In order to aid this process, a detailed analysis of two respondent walks has been provided in Chapter Three, and a **copy of the rough ‘questions map’ used during the** interviews, been provided in Appendix II.

Another methodological contribution that this thesis makes is in demonstrating the benefits of the relationship that emerges between the ethnographer and her subjects in the study of travel. Harry Wolcott writes that,

'emic ethnography is most successfully achieved when the effort is presented and clearly understood to be the telling of the ethnographer's version of a people's story. In spite of noble intentions that seem to require the ethnographer to disappear altogether, the storyteller in ethnography is the ethnographer⁴⁷⁶.

This is important in establishing two lessons: first, the field-specific relationships that develop between ethnographers and their subjects and second, the need for transparency in fieldwork method. In the introduction to their edited volume on the performances of and within tourist places, Simon Coleman and Mike Crang make some fascinating parallels between tourists and academics. Both, they say, are **concerned with 'translating foreign experience into domestic categories', creating capital, and in the production of authentic knowledge⁴⁷⁷.** For the tourist this entails understanding new places using categories available to them or even, as this work has shown to be the case on Iona, domesticating and dwelling in these places themselves. For scholars, the project might entail the translation of emic terms into etic categories, **and integrating their own research into their 'home' field of study.** Coleman and Crang make the point that if, in the vein of MacCanell, we see the tourism as motivated by authenticity and the creation of authentic knowledge, can we not say the same for the **scholar? Consider, for example, John Eade's observation that tourists in London were motivated to discover the 'essential character of a particular locality': seeking out places in order to pierce the 'authentic' character of neighbourhoods and of the city itself⁴⁷⁸.** Coleman and Crang would argue that the ethnographer undertakes a similar project.

⁴⁷⁶ Harry F Wolcott, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 1999), p. 148.

⁴⁷⁷ Simon Coleman and Mike Crang (Eds.), *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002) p. 9.

⁴⁷⁸ John Eade, 'Adventure Tourists and Locals in a Global City: Resisting Tourist Performances in **London's East End**' in Coleman and Crang (eds), *Tourism* pp.134 -135.

In October 2015, I organised a **'sharing of data'** in the village library on Iona (a full copy of the sharing text is in Appendix III). I organised this event after I had collected my data, and before I had begun to analyse it in detail, as a way of making myself accountable to visitors and islanders and as way of structuring my thoughts before beginning the process of analysis and writing. In this informal event, every sat around the same table, I provided some refreshment and one islander brought wood for a fire. The meeting was attended by a mix of islanders and visitors and, curiously, highlighted my own **'in-between' position on the island: as a visitor in** relation to residents, and a resident in relation to visitors.

On Iona, my **position as 'researcher' placed me** in a role in which I occupied a role quite like the student-apprentice-learner described in Chapter Three: benefitting from received knowledge, observing and learning about visitor and island life by participating in it. The day of the sharing represented a peculiar inversion, in which - even if for twenty minutes - I held a different position, as a mediator and interlocutor between visitors, seasonal staff and islanders (some of whom, interestingly, had never met each other before the day). Likewise, my research involved interviewing visitors while being a visitor myself. During the short trips that I made to bookend my fieldwork period, I was a visitor (in fact, the latter of the trips saw me accompanied by my family for a few days - every part the holidaying group on Iona). My first month of fieldwork - before gaining employment as hall cleaner and café worker - would also qualify me as a visitor (by my own criterion) in the project. Subsequent visits have seen me return as attendee in the music

festival and as a doctoral student working in the café while trying to write her thesis in-situ.

These parallels are especially important because they drive home the resonance **between researcher and subject when ‘travel’ or ‘tourism’ is the topic of study**. My project has not only aimed to make this resonance transparent but has suggested ways in which it can be put to use: by building itinerancy into research methods, by moving places of residence, using multi-sited methods of data collection, and using **‘wandering’ as a means of managing the field (Chapter Three)**. My own position can even be added (variously) to substantive arguments made in this thesis- by studying, for instance, the **ways in which the ‘walking interview’ format** permitted story-telling, or how the presence of a young, Indian, female researcher on Iona helped to reinforce the idea of Iona as an open, connected and safe place, or even how participation in an ethnographic study was a way for the respondents in this work to gain legitimacy **and have a ‘place’** in the ongoing story of Iona. This does not invalidate my argument; in fact, it adds some texture, even mischief to it. It foregrounds a consonance (even irony) in my saying, on the one hand, that visitors erase their labours on Iona, often to their own discredit while also, on the other hand, undertaking which details the labours of visitors on Iona. A sense of aptness, then, in the fact that the work that seeks to put the visitors back in the picture was written by a visitor too?

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11. Appendix I: Respondent List

Notes

1. Respondent names have been changed, both in the appendix and in the text of the thesis.

2. **In line with this thesis' emphasis on situating subjects within spatial contexts, the demographic details provided for the visitors record their length of stay on Iona, their type of accommodation, and the location of their interview.**

A. When 'N.A.' is indicated in the accommodation column, it means that the visitor did not stay overnight.

B. When 'island house' is indicated in the accommodation column, it means that the visitor either stayed in a house that a family member owns, or as an invited, non-paying guest of an island family. I have not clarified which in order to protect privacy.

C. The range of accommodation available is: Iona Community properties (Abbey /MacLeod Centre), **Bishop's House; Catholic House of Prayer; Findhorn House;** Campsite; Hotel; Hostel; B&B; Self-Catered, Island House. These have been grouped by category: Self-catered accommodations together, B&Bs together, hotels together.

D. Where possible, I have changed names of accommodation to protect privacy: island homes, self-catered places, hotels, shops. When the accommodation is directly linked to a Christian denomination, this has not been possible.

4. **For 'walking interviews', the location indicated is the place to which the respondent and I walked while recording the interview: the destination.**

A. The location **'Jetty; Ferry'** means that the interview was begun at Iona Jetty and continued on the ferry crossing to Mull. The only visitors with whom such interviews were conducted were day-trippers.

5. Demographic information such as nationality, sex, age has been withheld because they may identify particular respondents, when combined with accommodation notes.

A. The gendering and the ethnic-linguistic matches **the respondent's demographic information. So, 'Krittika' (Female; Indian) may be rendered as 'Dhvani'.**

6. While 18 supplementary interviews were conducted with island residents and seasonal staff, a respondent list has not been included in the thesis to protect privacy.

	Name	Duration	Accommodation	Location
1.	Bethany	1 day	N.A.	Pub
2.	Bella and Hal	3 days	Hostel	North End
3.				
4.	Ben	3 weeks	Campsite (Mull)	North End
5.	Beatrice	1 week	B&B	Hotel
6.	Beth	1 week	Island house	North End
7.	Bonny and Walter	2 days	Bed and Breakfast	Pub
8.				
9.	Cath	3 days	Catholic House of Prayer	Jetty
10.	Dave and Hamish	3 days	Campsite	Festival Tent
11.				
12.	Dagmar	1 week	Hostel	Hermit's Cell
13.	Dylan and Sarah	3 days	Hotel	Hotel
14.				
15.	Darla	1 week	Cois Na Farraige	Hotel
16.	Dana	3 days	Hotel	Jetty
17.	Dorothea	2 weeks	Self-Catered	Self-Catered
18.	Elliott	3 days	Hotel	Hotel
19.	Euan	1 week	Self-Catered	Machair
20.				

21.	Esther and Maximilian	1 day	N.A.	Jetty; Ferry
22.	Fiona	2 days	Hostel	Café
23.	George	3 days	Hotel	Crossroads
24.	Johanna	1 week	Cois Na Farraige	Parish Church
25.	Jaya and Rakesh	1 day	N.A.	Jetty; Ferry
26.				
27.	Joshua	1 day	N.A.	Abbey Grounds
28.	Ina	3 days	Self-Catered	Duchess' Cross
29.	Irma and Faye	4 days	Catholic House of Prayer	Columba's Bay
30.				
31.	Helen	1 week	Self-Catered	Self-Catered
32.	Jolene	3 days	Hotel	Village
33.	Katie and Simon	2 days	Hostel	North End
34.				
35.	Kara	5 days	Island House	Bay at the Back of the Ocean
36.	Karen	2 weeks	Hotel	Crossroads
37.	Katherine	1 week	Iona Community	Machair
38.	Keith	1 day	N.A.	Abbey Grounds
39.	Kaspar	4 days	Hostel	Columba's Bay
40.	Kiera and Niall	3 days	Island House	Island House
41.				
42.	Kevin and Nora	5 days	Hotel	Hotel
43.				
44.	Liam and Orla	1 week	Island House	Island House
45.				
46.	Martha	1 week	Self-Catered	Pub
47.	Maurice and Elise	2 weeks	Island House	Island House
48.				
49.	Mirella	3 days	Self-Catered	Hotel

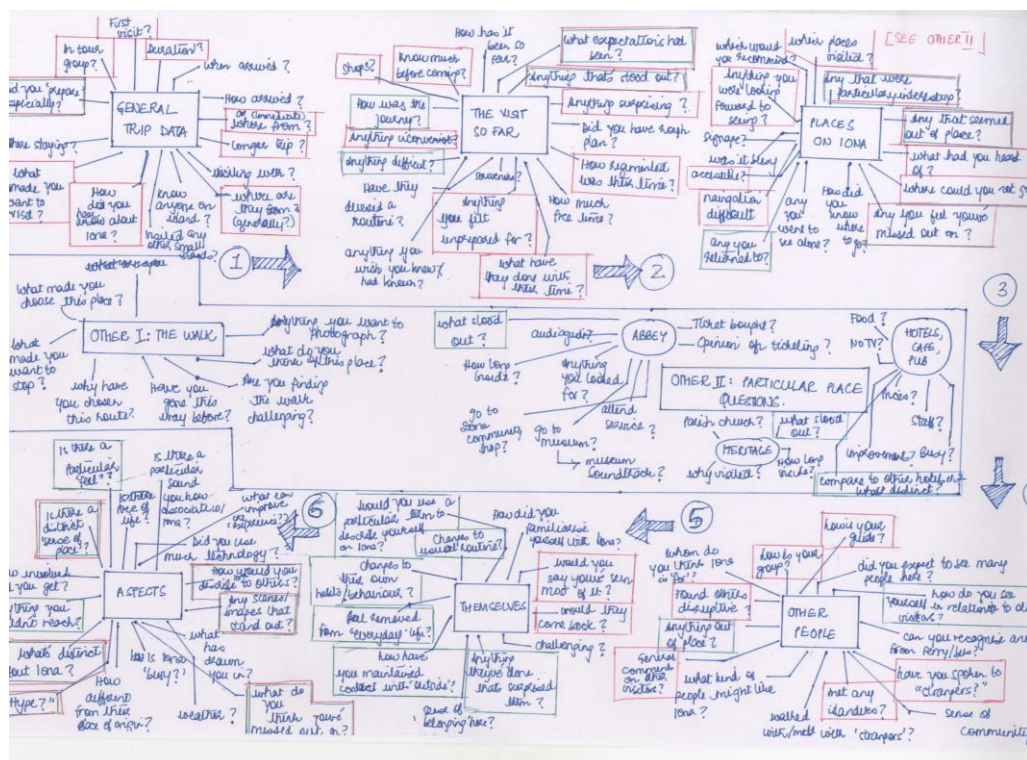
50.	Miriam	1 week	Bishop's House	Shore Road
51.	Nadine	1 day	N.A.	Port Ronan
52.	Natja	3 days	Campsite	Traigh Mor
53.	Neal	1 week	Iona Community	Abbey Library
54.	Niamh	3 days	Hostel	Calva Beach
55.	Noah	Hostel	Hotel	Hotel
56.	Norah	1 week	Findhorn House	Martyr's Bay Beach
57.	Norma	1 week	Iona Community	Abbey Grounds
58.	Richard	4 days	Campsite	Machair
59.	Rodney and Pat	1 day	N.A.	Cafe
60.				
61.	Rob	10 days	Island House	Island House
62.	Sabine	3 days	Campsite	North End
63.	Sammy and Eva	1 week	Catholic House of Prayer	Columba's Bay
64.				
65.	Suparna, Jeena, Shantanu	1 day	N.A.	Jetty; Ferry
66.				
67.				
68.	Tabassum	4 days	Island House	Sandeel's Bay
69.	Tara	4 days	Hotel	Hotel
70.	Tariq	5 days	Campsite	Chapter House
71.	Thomas	3 days	Hotel	Hotel
72.	Tessa	2 days	B&B	B&B
73.	Ulrich	12 days	Hostel; B&B	Spouting Cave
74.	Varani and Debjani	1 day	N.A.	Jetty; Ferry
75.				
76.	Vayu	4 days	Self-Catered	Village

12. Appendix II: The ‘Walking Interview’

Notes

1. The questions provided below are a more readable version of the ‘questions map’ I devised for Iona at the start of the fieldwork. A **copy of this ‘map’** is below, too.
2. The interviews followed a similar shape - from general, to specific, to reflective. Not every question was asked. **The best way to think of these questions is as ‘way-markers’**: **I made sure to ‘pass through’ each broad area but not necessarily** ask each question. This was partly an exercise of judgement but also my assessment of *what it seemed that the visitor herself wanted to talk about most*. This was key to getting respondents themselves to open up and to take more control of the conversation.
3. Some of the questions are quite similar and were merged in practice. There were questions that I did not end up asking at all - **‘Whom is Iona for?’ for instance seemed** too leading while I was in the field - and some others which I ended up adding to the list by the end because of how important the enquiry seemed (**‘What was the journey to Iona like?’ being an example of this**).
4. The questions that consistently returned some of the richest data were the ones that were open-ended to a degree, but also that required visitors to engage with **two concepts at once**. **‘What has surprised you about Iona?’ and ‘Is there anything you have found out of place here?’ are good examples of this**. The first, because in order to answer what surprised visitors, they had to return to what their expectations of the island had been; the second, because identifying the **‘out of place’** also means **identifying what ‘the place’ is**.
5. In the questions, a word **that may be visible in its absence is the word ‘special’**. This is because this was the list of questions I was working with at the start of the fieldwork process. Half-way through the process, once I had tracked the regularity with which the word was coming up, I became more confident about **‘teasing’** the notion of specialness, whenever it came up. For instance, if a respondent used the **word ‘special’ at any point** in the interview, I made sure to follow-up (then or at a later point) and ask them what they meant by it. Or - and only very rarely - if a **respondent used cognate words (‘it’s unique, it’s particular’)**, I asked them if the **word ‘special’ resonated with their understanding of Iona at all**. Importantly, I only

- Figure 12.1 | Iona Questions ‘Map’



1. Frequency/number of visits?
2. Are they part of a tour group?
3. Duration of visit, and arrival date?
4. Point of origin?
5. How they arrived/how they're departing (train, cycle across Mull etc.)?
6. Where are they from?
7. How did they heard about Iona?
8. What made them want to visit?
9. Were there special preparations that they made for the trip?

II. The visit so far

1. General impressions of Iona?
2. Their expectations of Iona?
3. How much free time did they have?
4. What have they done with their time?
5. Did they have a rough plan?
6. Have they settled into a routine?
7. What has stood out?
8. What has surprised them?
9. Are they finding anything inconvenient?
10. Are they finding anything challenging?
11. What were they most looking forward to seeing/doing?
12. Anything they want to do/want to do more of?
13. Would they come back?

III. Places on Iona

1. How much of the island have they seen?
2. How did they decide where to go?
3. Do they have a map?
4. Did they use the map?
5. Did they find navigation difficult?
6. Which places have they visited?
7. What did they think of those places (particular questions can be asked here)?
8. Where could they not go/did they choose not to go?
9. Any places they went to alone?
10. Any places they returned to?
11. Any places that they were drawn to?
12. Anything that seemed out of place?

IV. Other people on Iona

1. Whom did they expect to see here?
2. Who have they seen here?
3. **Any thoughts on other 'visitors'?**
4. How is their group (if any)?
5. How is their guide (if any)?

6. Have they met any islanders?
7. Have they spoken to many 'strangers'?
8. Would they use the word 'strangers'?
9. Instances where they found the presence of others beneficial, or enjoyed it?
10. Instances where found the presence of others disruptive or undesirable?
11. Do they feel closer to some people on the island (and not others)?

V. Themselves on Iona

1. How do they see themselves in relation to others on the island?
2. How did they familiarise themselves with the island?
3. Did they **'get involved with'** get the island, and its activities?
4. Can they note changes to their usual routine?
5. Can they note changes to own behaviour and choices?
6. How removed do they feel from their usual ('everyday') lives?
7. How have they maintained contact with the 'outside'?
8. What have they struggled with?
9. Any choices they've made/things they've done that has surprised them?
10. What are they looking forward to getting back to?
11. Is there a term they'd use to describe their time on Iona (vacation, holiday...)?
12. Is there a particular term they would use to describe themselves on Iona?

VI. Aspects of the island

1. How would you describe it to others?
2. **What do you think they have 'missed out' on, if anything?**
3. Are there any images and scenes that stand out?
4. What kinds of things have they photographed?
5. What, if anything, did they refrain from photographing?
6. Is there a sound that they might associate with the island?
7. Did they use their ipod, mp3 player, laptop, phones much?
8. Did they get time to themselves?

VII. Closing Questions: Broad Reflections

1. What's distinct about Iona, if anything?
2. Are there things that are out of place here?
3. Whom is 'Iona' for?
4. If they come back, are there things they would like to see protected or changed?

13. Appendix III: The Public Sharing

Note:

At the time of writing, the data collected on Iona has been publicly shared on the island once, in October of 2015. A second public sharing has been scheduled for April 2018, and this will be followed by providing two hard copies of the finished work that can be made publicly available to any islanders and visitors on Iona - with any additional redactions made for the protection of privacy - on the island of Iona, for anyone to read. I hope that this will ensure that the process of interpreting the island - and its specialness - remains open and, **to some extent, still ‘cooking’**.

The Sharing Text | 27 October 2015



Figure 13.1 | The Library Sharing [photograph by an islander present]

Welcome, Expectations, Clarifications, Ethics

Thank you so much for coming to this sharing, which is open to all: whether you're resident here, or visiting for a while. In many ways, this is one of the most important things I will do in the course of my PhD. It is one thing to do a study of a kind and then to present it back to students in a class, or to colleagues and professors back in University: most of them haven't been here. I could say anything about Iona and my claims might pass or be taken as authoritative in some way. To share my thoughts as a complete outsider, here, however? Audacious, and terrifying.

So thank you for coming. I did mean it when I used the word 'sharing'. What I hope to do is speak for about twenty minutes, and then open up the discussion to anyone who wants to speak: whether that's to ask questions, or to make a comment. The point is to use this time (about an hour, I should think) to share some of the things I've found in the last four months, and to hear if there's anything in that seems of interest to you. I'll take notes throughout- I hope that's alright. This is so that I remember the things that come up so I can follow them up later. If I use, directly or indirectly, anything you say, you will be anonymised to protect your privacy. If you'd prefer something you've said to be left off my notes, do let me know after the meeting. I'd be happy to do it.

What was the project, really?

The project was a study of visitors to Iona conducted as part of field-work for a PhD at the University of Edinburgh. My own background is in history but the work I am doing now is in a Religious Studies department. It grew of an interest in the relationship between religion and tourism, particularly about what happens when the two things are located within the same place. How does a place manage to be both 'touristic' and 'religious'? From the point of view of the visitor, what is the difference between these two things? I'd done my Masters dissertation on Rosslyn Chapel outside of Edinburgh and while there's definitely a longer work to be written about that, for the PhD, I wanted to work on a different place. My supervisor suggested Iona - we put it on a list along with a few other places, I did some basic reading and made a trip here last year in April. It seemed like the best choice for the work because it's not just 'tourism' and 'religion' here. The number of different things that Iona 'is', the number of different reasons why people live here, or work here, or visit here means that this place juggles, at the same time, several different 'identities' while still being the same place. Words like 'religious', 'spiritual', 'holy' get used to describe it but so do words

like 'crofting', 'peaceful', 'historic', 'busy'. How can a place hold so many different qualities? And what is the role of the visitor in a place like this? How do they interpret it?

In order to collect material to answer these questions, I have, from June through September, been doing taped interviews with visitors, observations at specific events, while also keeping myself open to conversations with everyone and anyone: visitors, islanders, seasonal staff alike. I spoke to anyone who would speak to me, went to any place that would have me, and tried to get, in a short span of time, as much of a sense of the different aspects of this island as a visitor spot. I never stayed in one place for very long: moving between places (of work) and even accommodation. But I've also eaten more cake than is strictly necessary and danced for hours with more gusto than recommended in the village hall: all for research purposes, of course.

So what is the research? The title I am working with - and this will probably change later - is 'Ordinary' Experiences in a 'Special' Place: visiting the island of Iona'. Ordinary and Special are in inverted commas, the favourite tool of people who sort of want to use a word but are too nervous to commit to it. It is an attempt to collect the interpretations and accounts of different visitors to the island, and see if there's any way that these can all be held together, and what that might say about Iona as a whole.

What is it not?

But equally, what is this research not? Some kinds of doctoral work are 'practical': they offer solutions, or new ways of doing things, they have direct beneficiaries, and can be implemented to help people and businesses. This is none of those things. Some of the things might have a practical application but - and this is a strange thing to say - it isn't designed to be 'useful' in that way. I am not proposing a visitor management plan, or coming up with a way to 'sell' Iona better. Its value, if any - might come through in other things, or at least I hope it will.

It is also not representative of any organisation, group or institutional agenda. When I first came to Iona - in April last year for a short trip to see if research was feasible, I knew no one and nothing. When I came back in April of this year, I still knew practically no one and nothing. I had no 'contacts' on this island that I did not make myself: I didn't have the benefit of word-of-mouth or friend-of-a-friend. I sent out some e-mails to people mentioned on the community council website, dropped in at some shops to say hello, and generally hoped for the best. I am not contractually obliged to produce this work for any organisation, nor am I representing anyone's interest other than, rather selfishly, my own.

A final clarification about what this thesis is not: it is not about residents or about seasonal staff on the island. That story is just as interesting: how do you manage to get about your usual day in the summer with people all around constantly? How do you tend gardens, raise children, fold cutlery, do inventory while still helping to maintain the illusion - for so many visitors - that Iona is tranquil, and removed from 'the outside world'? But it isn't my story to tell, is one thing. And second: in a world of data privacy and knowing that thesis will be made available to anyone who cares to read it, the protection of sources is key. It's more difficult to mask sources in a place where there's, say, only one hostel, one pub, one postie: how can I protect those who are speaking with me? It is for this reason that while my conversations and interviews with residents and staff have been enormously useful and although material from those conversations may appear in various guises, my outward focus is on visitors themselves. Besides, as a visitor to the island myself, it seems rather appropriate that the story I choose to tell is the story of other visitors.

Structured break for questions

With these clarifications in place, I'll pause in case any one has questions about the nature of the project and/or this sharing, before moving on to the 'meaty stuff': the tentative findings from the research.

What can be said so far?

I'm very early on in the analysis process - I've only had three-weeks off island so far and I've got about sixty hours worth of material to transcribe. It's only after transcribing everything that I'll be able to analyse it properly. So what follows is not by any means conclusive or comprehensive: they are preliminary thoughts and may change, grow or be completely discarded over the next year, perhaps even after the discussion! For now, I've picked up on three themes to present.

'Shared'

The first is the idea that the island is 'shared'. This is one of the most basic facts about Iona: its ownership is shared between groups, some properties on the island are managed jointly: there are partnerships, cooperatives, committees. And then in the summer, there are visitors and seasonal staff and residents, all sharing the same place. Many visitors will notice the presence of different groups on the island: people who've been coming here for years already know this, but for newer visitors to the island: this can sometimes be a discovery,

even a shock. Discovering, for example, that people actually live here. Or that not everyone here, for example, is involved with the Iona Community. Or that while they are picking pebbles in the machair, another group are playing golf.

The enquiry this begs is how different visitors relate to other people on the island. How near or far to other people do visitors want to place themselves? It has been very interesting to observe how 'communities' form in visitor experiences, and the decisions to seek or reject communities. So, for some visitors, seeking ties outside of themselves - conversing with others, making plans with other visitors - these aspects of collective experience are very important. The presence of other people is part of why they come - they co-ordinate their Iona dates with other families, they enjoy the hellos on the street, or the conversations in the shops. But then there are also those who use their time here to shed community, to have solitary time: people who come to 'retreat', who go to the North end because they don't want to speak to anybody, who leave their families behind at home for the express purpose of travelling alone. For some visitors I spoke to, Iona is the only place they travel to on their own, precisely to be left alone for a little while.

I wonder about these different attitudes to sharing - whether that's sharing a dormitory or the machair. It has also been interesting to see how space is shared but also well-partitioned. Where islanders are, visitors often are not; and it's the same with the other way around. There are many islanders at line of contact but it is completely possible to chart out a day through the island and avoiding every visitor hot spot. The football tournament and disco had practically no visitors; the Iona Community ceilidh had practically no islanders; a singer performed in the village hall to an audience of mostly islanders while visitors sat in the abbey for a 9 pm service. The discos and the wedding ceilidhs seemed to be the only occasions when different groups came together. I wonder, and this is the kind of the thing I might ask you to weigh in on: is this a fair estimate? Was it always the case?

'Safe'

A second theme that's coming up often is that of 'safety'. Several people keep saying how they appreciate that Iona is a 'safe' space. The word is used variously: women use it to say that Iona is the only place that they can walk around at night on their own without feeling threatened, older people have used it to say that it's a place that feels familiar to them and therefore safe, parents use it to say that it's a place they can leave their children on their own without worrying too much. Some people say that they feel 'safe' to explore difficult aspects of their faith here, or that it's a safe place to confront other issues in their life. The word comes up constantly, and unprompted. This whole conversation about safety is an interesting one if we see in alongside what I've just said about shared spaces. In an island

that so many people are passing through everyday, the fact that many people say they feel 'safe' here is noteworthy. The fact of this being an island seems to be some part of that - the Sound seems to, for many people, act like a buffer or a barrier, from the 'outside world'. But for me, it's worth thinking about how people interpret safety here. The idea that 'nobody locks their doors here' seems to be really attractive and is repeated a lot as a way of proving how 'safe' it is. So you have visitors telling other visitors, or their friends and family back home, that 'nobody locks their doors here'. It seems like a point of great curiosity for many people, but it also seems to represent some larger fact. That is, things like unlocked doors and honesty boxes seem to stand as symbols of something else: the safety of the island being one such thing. But I wonder if there are symbols like that that represent danger, and threat. The same unlocked door could seem dangerous to someone on the inside. And in a place where a twisted ankle or a serious injury might mean a helicopter ride to Glasgow, safety is worth thinking about. I wonder about how common the idea that Iona is 'safe' is, and what does the 'safety' of Iona allow visitors to do?

'Special'

The final theme is a word that's sitting in scare quotes in my thesis title: the word special. It comes up constantly and unprompted, and a wide range of visitors use that word. I hear it regularly, even from people who work and live here. Many visitors say that Iona is special, or that it is special to them. It comes up in tourist literature on the island too - guidebooks, websites, brochures. A lot of the time people will use the word directly - but sometimes it suggests itself in other ways: people indicating that Iona is exceptional in some way, that there's a distinctive quality or 'thing' that happens here that does not elsewhere.

Why is this word important? It's important because of something I mentioned at the start - the juggling of identities. For a Religious Studies thesis, there seems to be very little 'religion' in this. This is deliberate. In my four months, I have not simply done observations and interviews at the Catholic House, Bishop's House, Parish Church and Abbey; I have not targeted groups on spiritual retreats, or visitors to [*Cois Na Farraige*]. This is because at the heart of the thesis is the idea that the boundaries of words like 'religious' or 'spiritual' are drawn differently and what for some people represents a 'religious' gathering - a group school singing in gaelic inside the Abbey - for others is not. There is very interesting theoretical work by an American academic called Ann Taves who works in the University of California. She says that when we speak about the 'religious', we are in the first instance talking about the 'special', and that setting something apart as special is the first stage in building something up as 'religious' and 'spiritual'. It's an interesting suggestion. The word 'special' is stretchy in the sense that it can be extended to mean different things. So if it's coming up

again and again with regard to Iona, it's worth asking: what do people mean by it? Is it used as a filler, like 'interesting' or 'nice'? Or does it have its own weight, and is it used because people do not, for some reason, want to say some other word like 'religious' or 'spiritual'? There's also another side to the conversation: if some things are special, there must be things that aren't: things that are seen as ordinary, banal, or just not special enough. I wonder: what is on the other side of the 'special' on Iona?

What comes next, and a note of thanks

As is probably evident, there is a lot more to do before I get around to answering any of these questions. While my four months of scrambling for 'visitor data' is completed, my doctoral work on Iona is only half-way there: I hope to submit in December of 2017. What happens over the next few months is the transcribing of interviews and then getting to analysing them, which is the main work. I'll also be looking to get some factual information to give the thesis some context: some of this being historical information (such as when the ferry was introduced, and when the island stopped being a dry island) and some very basic facts-and-figures (how many properties currently cater for visitors, for instance, and visitor numbers in this tourist season). Finally, I will be making a couple of visits to Iona next year again, during which I hope to fit in more such sharings. I'm told that doctoral theses evolve constantly: these sharings seem like a good way for me to keep those interested abreast of the research, but also to hear some thoughts on the work and use them to shape this growing beast that I'm to be grappling with for the next several months.

So thank you again for your time, and for coming along today. I look forward to hearing what you have to say.